MRS. BRADLEY SERIES

GORY DEW

GLADYS MITCHELL

GORY DEW

Titles by Gladys Mitchell

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GORY DEW

GLADYS MITCHELL

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To my Brothers

R.J.
who boxed for London University and was awarded his Purple,

and C.S.
who, by using “the old one-two,” once knocked out his opponent in the first moments of the first round.

Contents

CHAPTER ONE Impresario
CHAPTER TWO Training Quarters
CHAPTER THREE Retort Discourteous
CHAPTER FOUR Lunch With a Crocodile
CHAPTER FIVE A Confusion of Cars
CHAPTER SIX The Hunt Is Up
CHAPTER SEVEN In and Out the Windows
CHAPTER EIGHT Further Proceedings
CHAPTER NINE Remanded In Custody
CHAPTER TEN Stymied
CHAPTER ELEVEN Georgics
CHAPTER TWELVE Not Golf But Croquet
CHAPTER THIRTEEN Innocents Day
CHAPTER FOURTEEN Tobias and the Angels
CHAPTER FIFTEEN Prisoner’s Release
CHAPTER SIXTEEN Various Bastards
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN Deductions and Conclusions
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN The Moonrocket Kid
Acknowledgment
About the Author

CHAPTER ONE

Impresario

"Now don't you mind old Satan,
With all his tempting charms.
He wants to steal your soul away
And fold you in his arms."

Anon.—*Negro Spiritual*

A few yards to the south of the level-crossing a patch was being put on the narrow country road and a grizzled man was waving a red or a green flag at intervals to control the passing of infrequent cars. That there were any cars at all along this outlandish stretch was owing mostly to the fact that a poet of some repute was buried two miles away in the village churchyard and that his grave had become a place of pilgrimage, particularly for Americans on holiday.

At the eastern side of the level-crossing stood a railway signal-box and, to the north of that, there was a large public house called the *Swan Revived*. Its somewhat insensitive sign depicted the prone figure of a ballerina (presumably Anna Pavlova) supported on the arm of a kneeling young man wearing white tights and a coronet who, with the hand which was not employed in propping up the lady, was holding a vast tankard of foaming ale to her apparently eager lips.

Opposite the signal-box and separated from it by the width of the road was a small, disused railway station. On what had been the "up" platform were the ticket office, the stationmaster's house, a waiting-room and, somewhat apart from this block, a large shed. On the "down" platform there was nothing but a solitary bench. From the end of each platform a white-painted wicket-gate opened on to the road (for there was no bridge by which passengers could cross the line), and behind the stationmaster's house and its adjuncts were a goods yard of considerable extent and what had been the station entrance for the purchase and collection of tickets.

The branch line had been intended originally for the convenience of passengers who wished to visit the poet's grave, but, since the automobile had become ubiquitous, the station had fallen (like the royal palaces of Troy and the courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep), into ruinous decay,

a victim not so much of the fell hand of Time as of the sweeping, iconoclastic reforms of Doctor Beeching. It had then been offered for sale and, after repairs and re-decoration, had been purchased on borrowed money by a young man named Tobias Sparowe and converted by him into a draughty, inconvenient home.

Sparowe, at this time twenty-six years of age, was that complete anachronism a true and dedicated amateur. His hobbies were botany, geology, and amateur dramatics; he was a very fair horseman (although he did not own a mount), he could box, fence, and swim, played cricket when he could get a game and was a keen dry-fly fisherman, although only as the guest of wealthier friends. He preferred Aristophanes to Euripides and liked smoked salmon better than caviar. His favourite modern authors were P. G. Wodehouse, Ivy Compton Burnett, and Cyril Hare and, in spite of the fact that he was domiciled in Dorset, he found Thomas Hardy unreadable.

By trade and inclination he was a biographer, and turned a poor but comparatively honest penny by delving into the private lives of the distinguished departed and committing the results to paper. He also contributed a weekly column to a woman's magazine, and his articles might well have ended up in the editorial waste-paper basket but for the fortunate fact that the editor was his maternal aunt. She took the prudent view, warmly supported by her husband, that to send the young man a weekly cheque drawn from profits made by the magazine was infinitely preferable to sending him money which would have to come out of her own or her husband's pocket, since the painstaking biographies he wrote did not bring in enough to support their nephew. It is only fair to report, however, that, rather than sponge on his relatives' private purse, he would have taken a job.

Apart from the fact that he would have preferred to write his column for men, in which case it may be assumed that he would have made a better job of it, it would be untrue and unfair to state that Toby took no interest in women, although it would be reasonably correct to say that the thought of marriage rarely crossed his mind. When it did, it came, not of its own volition, but was suggested to him by his aunt.

"It's an insult to womanhood," she stated on one occasion, "that a decent-looking, steady boy like you should go on being a bachelor. What's the matter with girls? Aren't any of them good enough for you?"

“Far too good, for I am sinful man, dear aunt,” Toby had blithely replied, but, in order to escape the pressure she was able to put upon him while he lived in London, he had given up his Baker Street flat and purchased the derelict station. It was about twelve miles from Morchester and two and a bit from the village of Heathcote Fitzprior, where Heathcote the poet lay buried. It was also inconvenient and draughty, and he let it as often as possible, so that he could afford to take a holiday away from it.

One morning in the middle of February the flag-waving navvy at the level-crossing held up a small, battered-looking car so that a farm lorry laden with horse-dung could make the passage between the hedge and a row of white and orange-coloured municipal skittles which marked off the roadworks from the rest of the lane. When he allowed the car to pass, it turned into what had been the station yard and pulled up between the back of the sizable shed and what had been the waiting-room. Two men got out and came round to Toby’s front door. One, as a mild concession to current trends, had modelled his hair-style on that of Mr. Simon Dee, although, sadly, he lacked that distinguished and lively artist’s good looks; the other favoured the more flowing coiffure affected by pop groups. Morever, this second man wore a beard, velvet trousers, and a near-mink overcoat, whereas his companion, except that he wore no hat on his shining hair, was as irreproachably dressed as a paid mute at a funeral, and in much the same style.

This man, extending a slender, neatly-gloved hand, gave a modest rat-tat on the door and, when it was not answered immediately, his companion beat upon it with both fists, demanding loudly, “Anybody home?”

Toby was not expecting visitors and did not recognize the voice. He flung open the door and was immediately embraced by the near-mink, who exclaimed rapturously.

“Sparowe, isn’t it? Not busy, are you? Not interrupting your literary labours, are we?”

“Oh, hullo,” said Toby, extricating himself. “What can I do for you? I —er—I don’t think 1 know you, do I?”

“Theatrical agents. May we come in?” asked the soberly-clad, kid-gloved man. “We’d like to proposition you, if we may.”

Toby took them into his sitting-room and seated them in armchairs. When he had taken over the railway station he had found that the stationmaster’s house, except for repairs and complete re-decoration, both

inside and out, had needed no alteration, consisting, as it did, of a living-room-cum-office and a kitchen and a scullery downstairs, and a large, a small, and a cubbyhole bedroom upstairs. The waiting-room, which adjoined the house on the east side, he had made into a study, as it had a fireplace. The booking-ofiice, which formed a similar adjunct to the west, he had converted, when he had closed permanently the booking-clerk's unsightly little grill, into a large, luxurious bathroom. Lack of funds had prevented further expenditure on plumbing, so the other essential retiring-room which had been for the station staff was still in the station yard, no provision of this kind for passengers having been deemed necessary by the railway authorities.

Toby looked enquiringly at his uninvited but not unwelcome guests, and these, with commendable promptitude, got down to business.

"You remember that *Tale of Two Cities* of yours?" said the near-mink. Toby, who had once turned the novel into a play for the dramatic society of which he had been a member, assented warily, surprised that the other should have heard of it. He said so, and added,

"But I don't lay any claim to be a dramatist, of course. I just rustle up something for the mob when we can't afford to pay author's royalties for a modern play, that's all, and, even then, the producer always knocks spots off the thing in rehearsal, and the cast complain about their lines and alter them to suit themselves, and all that sort of thing. I mean, by the time the ticket-holders get to see the play, it's not a bit like what I wrote in the first place, although the producer is decent enough to put my name on the programme, so, if you thought I was a dramatist—"

"But you *are* a professional writer, are you not, Mr. Sparowe?" asked the other man.

"Oh, well, yes, I suppose so. I bring out a book—a biography, you know—about once in eighteen months, but that means I've only written three in all; otherwise, well, I do a weekly column for a magazine called *Eve's Arbour,* and that's my lot. By the way, you seem to know me, but . . ."

"Oh, I'm Maverick," said the near-mink, "and this is Gracechurchstreet. Now, if it isn't an embarrassing question, dear fellow, do biographies make money?"

"Well, mine don't. I'm lucky if I sell two thousand copies. All the really important people have been done time and again, you see, so one is reduced to the smaller fry, and nobody is especially interested in most of

those, so books about them don't sell very well. I write biography to interest myself rather than my readers. To tell you the truth, I'm not sure the book I've just published will sell at all. It's the life-story of our local poet, a man called William Heathcote. He was shipped off to Virginia as a convict in the reign of Charles the Second, won his freedom and came back to Dorset, his native shire, to die in his own village, which was named after his family. They were the local big-wigs. Americans visit his grave because most of his poetry is about Virginia where, after a sticky start, he seems to have settled down happily for a time as tutor to the young sons of one of the tobacco planters."

"A convict?" said Gracechurchstreet. "I've had a look at your book, and he is the man we've come to talk about. Why was he transported? Have your studies established that?"

"Yes. He was a frequenter of taverns in his youth, often got into brawls, and in one of his drunken moments he killed an inoffensive bystander. For this he was sentenced to seven years' transportation."

"Wasn't murder a hanging matter in those days?" demanded Maverick.

"I suppose so, but Heathcote came of a good family, as I said. They were the squires of Heathcote Fitzprior, the village here, and had powerful friends, so I suppose, as Peachum would say, they softened the evidence."

"A tavern brawl and a sentence of transportation, eh?" said Maverick. "Well, that sounds just the kind of thing that my friend is looking for. What do you say, Gracechurchie?"

"The story needs pep," said Gracechurchstreet, in his prim voice. "Charles the Second you say, Mr. Sparowe? Well, the way I see it is this: the young fellow Heathcote, gay, good-looking, debonair and in his cups, as you just said, notes a tall, dark, handsome guy come into this bar with a smashing redhead. What he doesn't realize is that he is seeing Charles Two (acting incognito) with Nell Gwynn. Well, I seem to hear Heathcote pass the redhead a few well-intentioned compliments and Charles resents this and they frame for a punch-up. Well, the royal Mr. Stuart gets the worst of it, because Heathcote floors him, and the result is he is hauled off by the gendarmes and given his seven-year stretch, Nell Gwynn pleading with the king that the noose and the hot seat are out of it. Well, in the States, Heathcote is starving, but—"

"*Historically*," said Toby, with emphasis, "Heathcote was taken on as tutor to the two sons of a tobacco planter in Virginia, where he was sent to

serve his sentence. This sort of post was usually given to men who were *not* convicts. They were called Redemptioners, men of good character and some education who had been too poor to pay their passage out and had agreed with the captain of the convict ship to give them a free trip in exchange for several years' wages paid in a lump sum by one of the planters. They were usually taken on by the planters as tutors or clerks or something of that nature—work for which the convicts were usually unfitted."

"So these poor fellows—these Redemptioners—were in the position of slaves, you might say?" asked Gracechurchstreet. "Bully for them! Brave fellows! Sons of guns, Mr. Sparowe!"

"Well, they couldn't leave their employment and they took no wages until their time was up, but they were supposed to be decently treated and properly fed, and, if they were lucky, they lived more or less as members of the family. They could be trusted, you see, in a way that the convicts could not. It paid them to behave themselves and they usually stayed on in the colony for a bit when their time was up. Some of them made a lot of money."

"And Heathcote obtained these favours, although he was a convict? Well, what do you know!"

"Yes, indeed. Not only that, but, after his release, he stayed out there, too, made a modest fortune, and returned to England on his father's death to become squire of the village."

"Say," observed Gracechurchstreet in admiring tones, "that's quite a story, Mr. Sparowe. You mean 'local boy made good' in the little old United States? Well, sir, that's where men are men. I guess William Heathcote was a promising lad gone wrong, and it took my own great little old country to put him right and show him the way to the stars."

"He went to work for English Puritans who had gone out to the English colony of Virginia to escape the Restoration," said Toby flatly. "There was no United States of America in Heathcote's time. This Puritan family treated him well . . ."

"Yes, *sir*, you bet they did," interposed Gracechurchstreet emphatically. "And why? No, don't answer; I'll tell you. As I seem to see it, they treated William Heathcote real swell, and why not? Hadn't he rid the town of Bad Guy Maxie, the scourge of Prisoners' Gulch? Say, this begins to work up real good!"

“This Puritan family treated him well,” repeated Toby firmly, “for no reason except that they were those kind of people. Moreover, being Puritans, they did not gamble, drink or swear. Heathcote, therefore, was weaned from all his bad habits and began to write the poems which, later, brought him a modicum of fame. As they were mostly about Virginia, our village has become a place of pilgrimage for patriotic American visitors, wherefore this station was built and so was the large pub on the other side of the road.”

“O.K. Now, Mr. Sparowe, we are here to proposition you, like I said. We want you to write this up as a play for us, but you must keep to the lines I lay down. It’s commissioned work, and it’s got to be done my way.”

“Look,” said Toby, “let’s get one or two things straight. You want me to write a play based on the life of William Heathcote. How did you know I had written his biography? Did you say you’ve read it?”

“Yeah, I chanced to pick it up, and Mr. Maverick here saw your *Tale of Two Cities* and liked the style of it. I made enquiries and found you had taken over this railway station. Well, I could see only one reason for that. You wanted to be on the spot to get local colour for your book on this poet, so—”

“It wasn’t that at all. I took over this place for purely personal reasons. Nothing to do with my work,” protested Toby.

“Ah, that’s what you claim, Mr. Sparowe,” said Gracechurchstreet, stroking the black kid gloves which lay on his black-clad knee, “but when I realised that there was a genu*ine*, ail-American poet buried in the village here, as I did when I took a gander at your book, why, I went straight away to work with friend Maverick here, and it’s taken us all of fifteen days to track down the writer. Well, after making more enquiries than I could get you to believe, finally we came up with this *ad*dress, so here we are and here’s our proposition. You see, I figured that a young guy like you would never have buried himself in a one-horse lot in Dorsetshyer unless he was on to a good thing. Well, now, a good thing for you might be a better thing for us, you being included in the ‘us.’. You’ve gotten yourself a corner in this William Heathcote guy, but right now, Mr. Sparowe, you’ve got to share. I don’t know how you cottoned on that this poet was going to be big money, but a smart guy like you will get his pickings somehow, on account you can’t keep a good man down, so what I’ll do . . .”

“Half a minute,” said Toby. “You seem to think I came down here because I realized the possibility of making money out of writing a life of Heathcote. It wasn’t like that at all. It wasn’t until I came to live here (simply to get away from London) that I even knew there *was* such a chap as Heathcote. Well, then, when I began reading him up—the Morchester library has quite a lot of stuff on him and I’ve had access to private papers as well—I admit it did occur to me that his life-story might interest Americans. We get quite a number of them here to visit his grave, as you probably know. All the same, you *must* realize that all this occurred to me *after* I had moved down here. It was certainly not the reason for my coming. Furthermore, as I’ve tried to indicate to you, I am *not* a dramatist. I am the only professional writing man in the amateur dramatic society to which I belong, but I have never done any work of any kind for the professional stage. I tell you this to save you from wasting your time. It’s very kind and complimentary of you, and all that, but—”

“Just a moment, dear thing,” said Maverick. “Wait until Gracechurchie explains. This wouldn’t be for the professional stage as such. You’re jumping to conclusions, laddie.”

“Oh?” said Toby. He grinned. “That means you’re putting on an amateur show and expect me to do the job for nothing. Well, as Shakespeare says somewhere or other, nothing will come of nothing, so that’s that.”

“Oh, now, look, Mr. Sparowe,” said Gracechurchstreet, in a pained tone, “we wouldn’t expect to have you give us your services for nothing. No, *sir*! Please give me a chance to explain. It’s this way: I am what I believe is known as an impresario. Now I am an admirer of your great little country and I confess to taking a mighty interest in your institootions and traditions, particularly your folk-lore and your reverence for the past. Now, Mr. Sparowe, down the years I have attended your big Druid gatherings in Welsh Wales. I have been present at your Highland Games in bonnie Scotland. I have witnessed your Morris dancers, your sword dancers, your horn dancers, your country dancers, your pancake races, your barrel-rolling contests, your cycles of medeeval plays, and much more of great antiquity and significance, and I revere them, Mr. Sparowe. Yes, *sir*, it is not too much to state categorically that I revere them.”

“Well, quite,” said Toby, “but I can’t see where this is getting us.”

“Why, my idea is simply this: I want to take your old-time English folk-lore over to the United States of America. I want to sell it to all our big

cities. I want . . .”

“But, even if all this was possible, Mr. Gracechurchstreet, the life of William Heathcote isn’t folk-lore. It is simply and solely history. It’s in the records. It’s in letters and memoirs. It’s in a bill of indictment for murder. It’s in the account books of Heathcote Hall and it’s in the village parish registers. It’s not traditional; it’s all written down in bits and pieces here and there, and all I’ve done is to collect and edit these and turn them into a book.”

“Now, wait a minute! You young fellows are so impatient and hot-headed and impulsive. Here is my argument: I could get country dancers, yes; folk and ballad singers, yes; caber-tossers, mummers, fellows who can play sackbuts and crumhorns and rebecs and all those kind of weird and wonderful things, and all this would be of very, very great interest to the great American public which, as you know, goes in for culture in a big, big way, and my programme could be just dripping with old-worldliness in every respect you can figure out. But you perceive my difficulty?”

“Salaries, transport and lodgings, I should think,” said Toby. For the first time since he had entered the station, the American bared tombstone teeth in a death’s-head smile.

“You young fellows will have your little jest,” he said. “Our college boys back home are just the same. No, Mr. Sparowe, my difficulty is that there would be nothing on my programme with which the great American public could identify, unless . . .”

“I thought all your policemen were Irish. Give ’em *Molly by the Shore* and they’ll applaud the roof off.” Toby was beginning to tire of the conversation.

“What I’m going to give the great pan-American nation, Mr. Sparowe, is your play about the noble Virginian poet William Heathcote. What is more, I am offering you five hundred dollars plus a percentage for a drama with a playing-time of one hour fifteen minutes. That is all the time I shall need, with the rest of my programme to fit in. I should have mentioned that my programme is to be televised. Well, now, what do you say?”

“Why don’t you get somebody to write a play about the Tolpuddle Martyrs? They were transported, too, you know,” said Toby, getting up from his chair.

“Because, sir, they may have been martyrs but they were not Americans . . .”

“Oh, come now, I know they were shipped to Australia, not America, but Heathcote wasn’t American either,” objected Toby, sitting down again.

“My second point,” pursued Gracechurchstreet, “is that I can find no *ro*mance in their story. Now, in the case of William Heathcote, I seem to see the kind of *ro*mance which is going to bring an ail-American audience to its feet—all of those who are not sobbing into their pocket handkerchiefs, that is to say—and they will be yelling for more. There’ll be this love scene when Nelly and William meet secretly after William has kay-owed the king, and then there’ll be this great renunciation. I seem to hear Nelly saying, in broken tones and with her red-gold hair falling all about the two of them, I seem to hear her say. ‘It breaks my heart to send you away, Willie darling, but Charlie’s need is greater than your own.’ Now, *sir*, is that a line, or is that *not* a line, to call for the slow fade-out on the long passionate embrace? Is it? *You tell me*!”

“But nothing of that sort *happened*, I tell you!” said Toby. “Heathcote killed a man—certainly *not* the king—in a tavern brawl. He got transported, lived with Puritans in Virginia, mended his ways, came home and wrote poetry. And that’s your lot! I’ll try to write you a play on those lines, if you like, but I will *not* bring in Charles the Second *or* Nell Gwynn, and a bout of fisticuffs doesn’t enter into the story at all, so far as I know, but a killing *did*, and not a romantic one, either.”

“Well, see here, then,” said Gracechurchstreet, after exchanging glances with Maverick, “I’ll agree to leave out Charlie and Nell, so long as you will agree to give us a good scene embodying the brawl, with plenty of action and at least one knockdown before we get to the murder. How was it done, by the way?”

“Oh, Heathcote, like all landed gentlemen, wore a sword. He drew it and ran his man through.”

“That, surely, was a dooel, not a murder? A dooel in the play would be quite a thing! Yes, *sir*, I’ll go for that.”

“The other fellow hadn’t got a sword. He was the local clergyman, come to intervene. That, I suppose, is why there was such a hoo-ha about it, because it *was* a murder, plain and simple.”

“A *preacher* in a tavern brawl?” Gracechurchstreet affected horror.

“Apparently—in fact, definitely,” said Toby, “He’d been sent for to restore law and order.”

“You’ll have to leave him out of it, Heathcote has got to be presented as the hero of the piece. You can’t, in the great country of which I am honoured and proud to call myself a citizen, equate a stabber of defenceless preachers with anybody the great American public would wish to identify with. *No, sir*! You’ll have to make it some hobo who has bandied Heathcote’s sweetheart’s name about, or insulted Heathcote’s mother—something that will get the great American public on Heathcote’s side and keep them there for the doo-ration of the drama.”

“Look,” said Toby, with weary patience, “we’re wasting time. Do I have to spell it out? If I write this play, I write it as history, not as fantasy; as fact, not as romance.” He got up again. “I really think, gentlemen, there’s no point in our continuing the conversation. My conception and yours of what can be done in the way of presenting history in terms of the drama are obviously poles apart. It’s very good of you to have sought me out and offered me this commission, but I must absolutely decline to accept it.”

Gracechurchstreet took a bulging wallet from an inside pocket of his funereal overcoat and tapped on the arm of his chair with it.

“Mr. Sparowe,” he said, “you will surely reconsider this intransigent attitood. In here I have one hundred English one-pound treasury notes. I am willing to give them to you, here and now, irrespective of the five hundred dollars I promised you for the play. There is only one stipulation. There *must*, sir, be a fist-fight. Apart from that, you may deal with the material as you see fit. After all, you don’t *know* they didn’t come to blows before the killing. And, sir, that fist-fight has got to be good, and it *must* be with a villain. I have to insist that you substitoot for the preacher. William Heathcote must hold the sympathy and goodwill of the vast American public throughout the play from first to last. Surely you can figure that out for yourself? Now, sir, are we in agreement?”

“It doesn’t seem like it, does it?” said Toby. “And now, gentlemen, I’m sorry, but I’m a busy man.” He held out his hand. “I’d better wish you good-day. Thank you for calling.”

CHAPTER TWO

Training Quarters

"But what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?"

William Shakespeare—*Sonnet 65*

Toby, although he claimed to be a busy one, did not consider himself an imaginative man. If he had been, he thought that he would probably have written novels, poetry, or plays rather than biographies. All the same, biographies need sympathetic interpretation, which implies one kind of imagination and this he possessed. Having seen them off in their noisy little battered Prendergast Minor (the property, he supposed, of Maverick), the more he thought about his visitors the stranger did their mission appear. In the end, he shrugged away the incident, glanced at his watch, and realized that it was well past opening time at the *Swan Revived*. The public house, like a seaside lodging, expected to be busy only between Easter and the end of September. From October until the first week of April it was run by a skeleton staff consisting of the landlord, his wife, and one maid who happened to be the wife's cousin. The landlord had to be on call in the bar during the late autumn and winter licensing hours, but at other times he cleared up the garden and did odd jobs in the way of interior decorating so that the place was ship-shape and ready for an influx of custom in the spring. The women did a kind of autumn spring-cleaning in the bar, kept the housework going, washed and put away the summer curtains, drove into Morchester for the shopping, and lived what amounted to a peaceful private life compared with the somewhat hectic summer season when the inn was invaded by coach-parties, hikers, and motorists.

Toby was surprised, therefore, after some months of having the saloon bar to himself most mid-mornings, to see a large green Cosmo-Carrick drawn up outside the inn, and the house in the throes of what amounted to an invasion. No fewer than four men were seated on stools at the counter. Three of them, who were drinking beer, were middle-aged. The fourth was a gloomy young man, hardly more than a boy, who had an empty bottle of bitter lemon at his elbow and was eyeing with bitter dislike the remains of what was in his glass. Except that he had an ear which had been in the wars,

there seemed nothing except his morose expression to distinguish him from the Apollo Belvedere. Toby did not think he had ever seen so remarkably beautiful a youth. Even the slouch of his discontented body could not disguise its graceful strength. His muscular thighs strained against his tight trousers and the strong pillar of his neck rose from his open-necked shirt like the tower that David builded.

There was no other resemblance to the lover in the Song of Solomon. A nearer analogy, Toby thought, was to be found in William Blake, for there was something feline, something tigerish, about the young man which, taken in conjunction with his slightly misshapen ear, marked him out as a professional boxer. “What immortal hand or eye,” muttered Toby to himself, “could frame thy fearful symmetry?”

He nodded to one of the middle-aged men who happened to catch his eye and who closely resembled an ape, ordered a pint, and retired with it to one of the small tables. He took out a cigarette but, before he could light it, the ape said sternly,

“No smokin’ in the bar while the Moonrocket’s in ’ere. Spile ’is wind.”

Toby lit his cigarette and took a swig at his tankard. The ape came over and loomed menacingly.

“’Ear what I said, mister?” he demanded. “Out that drag!”

“Get lost,” said Toby. The man appealed to a beringed and flashily-dressed companion who was at the end of the bar, a slightly-built fellow with large, sad eyes and a curly Levantine mouth.

“Shall I dot ’im one, Mr. Gorinsky?” he demanded. “’E’s give me lip.” Before he could receive any reply, Apollo Belvedere slid from his stool.

“Aw, nark it,” said the beautiful young man. He came across to Toby’s table and gave the ape a shove. “You leave ’im be. I ain’t a prima donna and I *likes* the smell of baccy.” He hitched up a chair and sat down. The ape retired, muttering, and the flashily-dressed Mr. Gorinsky wagged an ornately-ringed forefinger at him and said warningly,

“Don’t go making trouble, Chris, boy. We ain’t in training quarters, is it?”

“These is trainin’ quarters.”

“Only upstairs.”

“Cheese!” growled the ape, returning to his beer. Toby said to the youth,

“In training, then?”

“Ah.”

“I’ll put out my fag, if you like.”

“Naw. You don’t want to take no notice of old Chris. ’Ave me in nappies and gimme a baby’s bottle if ’e could. ’E’s me trainer.”

“Got a fight in prospect, then?”

“Wants me,” said the youth, too full of his wrongs to answer the question, “to keep me weight dahn and do bleedin’ road-work. *Road-work*! And me wiv my foby!”

“Too bad,” said Toby, hoping for enlightenment on the last point. It was soon made clear.

“Just because I got to keep meself dark till we goes across to the States, vey brings me to vis bleedin’ country pub where I can’t even ’ave no beer ’cos it might put on a bit of fat. And I got to do *road-work*! I wouldn’t mind so much if one on ’em could run wiv me. I got vis foby, you see. Miles and miles and *miles* we come froo on the way dahn ’ere, and all of it open country wiv bleedin’ trees and vat. Drive me rahnd the bend to run on me own, and none on ’em as’ll see forty again, so vey’re no flamin’ ’elp. Vey’ll set on ’ere and set on ’ere, gettin’ corns on veir flippin’ fannies and drinkin’ all the flamin’ beer, while all the time vere’s *me* doin’ bleedin’ *road-work*, and gettin’ the screamin’ ’eebies. I’d chuck it, if I ’adn’t signed the pipers. Can you get quodded for signin’ papers, mate, and ven ’oppin’ orf aht of it?”

“Not necessarily. You might be fined, I suppose. Do you mean you suffer from agoraphobia?”

“Ah. Gimme a boxin’ ring wiv ropes all rahnd, and I’m all right. Gimme a room full of people—all right again. But, do you know what? I couldn’t even play football, mate, not if vere was trees, like in the park. Drive me rahnd the bleedin’ bend it would. But I signed the pipers, see? I reckon vey got me tied up proper. Not as I’d mind goin’ to quod s’long as vey shoved me in a cell and let me stay vere. But if vey was to put me choppin’ dahn trees—well, I see a picture of it once and, do you know what, mate? All me bleedin’ dinner come up.”

“Is Gorinsky the chap with the Koh-i-Noor diamond on his tie and the signet ring like a headlamp?”

“Ah. ’E’s me manager.”

“Doesn’t he understand how you feel about open spaces? I mean, agoraphobia is a very real thing. More people have claustrophobia, though, I believe. I suffer a bit from that myself. Some claustrophobics would go mad if you put them inside a boxing ring, I expect, but they’re quite at home on the wide open spaces. Your trouble is just the opposite, but it can be a very horrifying thing.”

“Say, what *are* vese fobies, mate?”

“Well, it’s like these people who can’t stand a cat in the room. It’s not that they’re afraid of cats, but they have a sort of mental allergy to them, just as some people have a physical allergy to certain substances and have asthma or come out in spots if they get into contact with them.”

“You got a fair gift of the gab, mate. Wonderful.”

“Thanks. Look here, I wouldn’t mind doing a bit of road-work myself. How would it be if I ran with you sometimes?”

“Mate, you got sympafy. Now the on’y one of vem over vere what got sympafy is ’Arry. ’E’s the one in the ‘ard ’at. But vey don’t take no notice of ’*im*. ’E’s me sparrin’ partner and ’e’s got sympafy wiv me foby ’cos I don’t never ’it ’im too ’ard, see? ’Cos ’e can’t take it no more, see? ’E’s pushin’ fifty, ’Arry is, and ’e’s punch-drunk, see, and ’e can’t take it, so I goes light, see, ’cos I got sympafy, too. We bofe got sympafy wiv each uvver. It’s a very beautiful fing, sympafy is.”

“Lunch is served upstairs, gentlemen,” said the landlord, returning to the bar after a short absence which had gone unnoticed by the two young men at the table.

“Come on, Rocky. Grub up,” said the flashy individual. “Send up a couple of quarts in jugs, landlord, and a double Scotch for me and barley water for the Moonrocket Kid.” He led the way out and, with a final bellow of “Come on, Kid,” from the ape, the older men left the bar.

“See you later, then,” said Toby.

“Barley water!” said the Moonrocket Kid in sepulchral tones. “I say, mate, do me a favour. You don’t mind, do you? I’m dyin’ of first.” He seized Toby’s tankard and drained it. “Fanks a lot, mate. Saved me bleedin’ life!”

“You’re welcome,” said Toby. He took the empty vessel over to the bar as the youth walked out in the wake of his companions. “What’s all this in aid of, Mr. Smetton?” he asked, as the landlord, setting aside the tankard, filled a fresh one and pushed it across.

“Training camp,” replied the landlord. “Don’t know the parties, and I’m blowed if I know whether I want them here or not, but you don’t turn good money away this time of year, if you can help it. Mother says she seen you had visitors too, Mr. Sparowe.”

“Yes. Never saw them in my life before, though. Odd couple of bods. Wanted me to write a play for them about William Heathcote.”

“A play, eh? I’ve heard there’s nice money in plays.”

“Well, there won’t be—in this one. They wanted a complete botch-up of the life-story, with about as much solid fact in it as in one of the historical dramas in the days of the silent films. But do you mean that that mob are actually staying here? I didn’t know you ever took in guests who were going to want bedrooms and full board.”

“Neither we do, not as a rule, but they reckon to be gone by the twentieth of next month. I told them I couldn’t keep them once March was out. They wanted a big room where they could put up a portable ring, and somewhere to hang a punching bag, and so on. Well, there’s that first-floor room where we’re licensed for dances, and that’s a white elephant, anyway. I’ve been landlord here nearly five years, and all that time I’ve had just two bookings for it. We’re off the map, you see, so, what with that and the breathalyser, I told them they could have the ballroom and bed down in the attics where I sleep the summer staff, and they could hang up their punching-bag in the garage, and that was the best I could do.”

“Where do they come from?”

“Londoners. That flash sort of slim fellow, the boss, the chap they call Gorinsky, paid a month in advance with a cheque on the Cricklewood branch of Plendell’s Bank, with Gorinsky’s name in print underneath where he put his signature. I rang up the branch in Morchester, and they rang up Cricklewood, and the cheque’s all right, so there we are. Mother isn’t too pleased at all the extra cooking and cleaning, but I promised her that, if they don’t behave, out they go, and it’s only for six weeks or so, anyway.”

“The young chap, the boxer, is a pro, I take it.”

“Only eighteen years old, and a welter-weight. Boxes at around ten three, so he tells me, but his training is aimed to fine him down. He’s trying to make nine seven. Personally, I wouldn’t bet on it, without they starve him. There’s no spare ounces on him, so far as I can see.”

“Nine seven? That would bring him just within the lightweight class. What’s their idea? Do they think he stands to get classier bouts than he does

as a welter-weight?—better opponents, maybe?”

“Goodness knows. I don’t. He seems a nice enough young chap, although mother thinks he ought to be warned about using language. I tell her it’s just his vocabulary, and doesn’t mean a thing.”

“I’ve promised to run with him. He seems to be scheduled for a lot of road-work, and he isn’t very keen.”

“Padding along roads may put muscle on him, but I doubt whether it will get his weight down much, unless they load extra clothes on him to make him sweat a lot. He hasn’t got fat to lose, and perspiration got that way is weakening, in my opinion. After all, a boxer isn’t like a jockey. So long as he’s perfectly fit, and can make the natural weight for his own class, he ought to be allowed to keep to it, I’d say. Not that I know a lot about it. I’m a pigeon-fancier myself. All the same, seems to me there wouldn’t be all these different weights, eight altogether, from fly up to heavy, unless they were based on nature’s rulings, Mr. Sparowe. And in the amateur classes there are variations and also two classes more, light-welter up to ten stone and light-middle up to eleven stone. They don’t want amateurs giving away too much poundage and getting hurt, I suppose.”

“You seem to me to know a lot about it for a pigeon-fancier,” said Toby. “Well, be that as it may, you might let the young man know I’m at his disposal for a run before breakfast or after tea any day, but the rest of my time must be counted out. I have to devote some of my life to earning my bread and beer.”

“He’ll be glad enough of your company, I don’t doubt, Mr. Sparowe. He seems a likeable young chap. I’ll tell him what you say.”

It was the middle of February, and by eight o’clock the sun had barely risen, but it was light enough at seven-thirty for a run. Toby was up and had drunk a cup of tea and eaten a couple of slices of thin bread and butter by the time the Moonrocket Kid knocked on the door. The lad was wearing a dark blue track suit, a crimson silk muffler, and white sneakers, and looked, if possible, even more beautiful than when Toby had first seen him. Toby offered him tea, but he explained that he had already had some so, without more ado, they set out on their training spin.

“About five miles suit you?” asked Toby, closing his front door and leading the way along the platform.

“All right.”

“This way, then. We’ll follow the road to the heath and then cut away westward towards the river. There’s another road drops south from there and crosses the railway further up. Then we turn again at a farm and follow the major road home. Quite pretty country all the way, a bit of a switch-back, but not really hilly.”

“Good-o.”

“You set the pace, then, will you? You know how fast you want to go.”

“Nuffink but flippin’ joggin’ don’t suit me. I don’t reckon to be no perishin’ sprinter.”

“OK. Just suit yourself.” They broke into a trot. “By the way, I can’t keep calling you the Moonrocket Kid. What’s your name?”

“Dave.”

“Toby here.”

Just under a quarter of a mile brought them on to the heath. Toby wondered what Dave’s reaction would be, but the boy made no sign of distress. A quarter of a mile further on there were cross-roads. They entered the left-hand branch of these, the road became as narrow as a lane and the slope was downhill. There was no conversation between the runners. Toby’s thoughts dwelt on his visitors of the previous day. What Dave was thinking, or whether he was thinking at all, Toby had no idea. The boy’s trouble did not manifest itself until they had skirted the farm and were headed towards a small wood. Up to this point they had been jogging along side by side, but here Dave dropped back and into a walk. Then he stood still.

“What’s up? Got a stitch?” asked Toby, pulling up and going back to him.

“No. I ain’t goin’ in by vem flippin’ trees.”

“No choice, unless we go all the way back. Come on. We’re only about a mile and a half from home. The railway is just the other side of the wood. There’s a level crossing. Once over that, we can almost smell the bacon and eggs.”

“I ain’t goin’ into no woods.”

Toby was puzzled and slightly vexed. They had crossed part of an open heath and followed lonely by-roads, some of which were not even bordered by hedges, and there had been no reaction from the boy, so why he should suddenly capitulate in this way at the sight of a small and by no means a dense wood, Toby could not understand.

“Oh, come *on*!” he said, laughing. “I’m not going all the way back. I want my breakfast.”

“O.K., ven,” said the lad unwillingly. “You run next vem trees, vough.”

“Tell you what! Let’s take a couple of minutes for a breather and then rush it. You could sprint a few hundred yards, couldn’t you? And then we’ll take another breather on the other side of the level crossing.”

This plan worked. Dave, in fact, ran so fast that Toby was hard put to it to keep up with him. Once on the far side of the wood they slowed to their former jog-trot, crossed the railway line and then dropped into a walk. Toby was breathing heavily. Dave gave no sign of distress. He said, as they strolled towards the sun before turning north on the last stage of their outing,

“I reckon you fink I’m a bleedin’ fool.”

“No, I don’t. I knew a stout chap at college—played rugger and all that—and he had your kind of trouble, only, with him, it was the opposite way round. He couldn’t stand confined spaces. Wouldn’t shut the door of the loo or the bathroom door, and if his shirt-stud rolled underneath the bed he dared not get it back. There was a reason for it, of course. When he was a small kid he’d gone exploring by himself and got stuck in a culvert, and it was several hours before he was found. He nearly went cuckoo and for years he couldn’t get over it. He’s all right now, though.”

“He’s lucky. What straightened ’im aht, ven?”

“Oh, a fellow on our staircase was nephew or grand-nephew to one of these psychologist people—an old lady. She put him right. Took some time, but she did it. The trouble was, you see, that the chap had had such a shock that his memory of the incident had gone blah on him. All he knew was that he couldn’t bear to be shut up. She uncovered the cause and sorted it all out. The last I heard was that he’d become an inspector of coalmines, so that just shows you, doesn’t it?”

“He’d forgot what turned ’im tizzy?”

“Except for these vague terrors, yes, he had.”

“I ain’t forgot, you see.”

“Why, what happened?”

The boy shook his head impatiently and said,

“Let’s get on the trot again. I’m ’ungry.” They took up the running once more. Toby accepted Dave’s hint and made no further reference to his

phobia.

The next time Toby saw the Moonrocket Kid was later that same morning when he went across to the *Swan Revived* for a drink. A thudding sound above the ceiling of the bar indicated men at work. Toby cocked an eye.

"Sparring practice?" he asked the landlord.

"Ah. They've rigged up a portable ring like you can have in a gym, if you don't want it there permanent," said Smetton. "A kind of low platform it is, with poles sunk in the corners to hold the ropes. But it's my opinion the lad had ought to have more sparring partners. There's only that one old chap and, anyway, I'd say he's past it."

"Think I might go up and see the Kid in action?"

"Nothing to stop you. Got two visitors already. I mean, doesn't look as if they're trying to keep his form dark, or anything of that nature. These two gents come in and was invited up to take a look at him."

Toby picked up his tankard and, admitted to the back of the bar by a flap in the counter, passed into the landlord's parlour, and mounted a broad staircase. The shuffling and thudding ceased as he reached the ballroom door. It was wide open, but, from the top of the stairs, he could see nothing but a stretch of empty floor-space. He went in. The portable ring was at the far side of the room. The Kid was seated on a stool being flapped around with a small towel wielded by his trainer, while in the opposite corner his sparring partner was taking off his protective head-gear and panting heavily. There was no sign of the man who had been referred to as the boxer's manager, and the visitors, to his surprise (since he understood they had gone to London), were his consultants of the previous day.

"Mind if I come in?" he asked, advancing.

"Oh, 'ullo, Tobe," said the boxer, brushing aside the flickings of the towel. "Make yourself at 'ome. I just finished. 'Arry can't take no more."

"You *ain't* finished," dispassionately stated the towel-flapper, suspending operations. "Got to do a bit of bag-punchin' when you done your skippin'. You knows vat as well as I do. Got to sweat you down, and don't you forget it."

"Or else no trip to New York, I'm afraid, friend," said Gracechurchstreet. "Ah, good morning, Mr. Sparowe."

"Oh, hullo," said Toby. "I thought you'd gone to London."

“Ah, that doesn’t take long. We were going to call on you again, but we looked in here for a highball.”

“I’m afraid you won’t get me to change my mind.”

“Too bad. We could put the money up a little, if that would be any inducement.”

“Sorry.”

"Oh, well, that’s how it does,” said Maverick. “Come downstairs and, to show there’s no hard feelings, let me buy you a drink.”

“No more, thanks. I’ve had my mid-morning quota.” Toby waved his empty tankard. “Can’t afford to overdo the beer. Got to get into training.”

“Oh? How come, then?” Maverick and Gracechurchstreet exchanged glances.

“Nothing, really. I’m contracted to do a spot of road-work with the Kid here.”

“Well, that’s nice for you both,” said Maverick.

“By the way, what’s your interest in getting his weight down? It’s not my business, but if he sweats much more off himself it’s going to weaken him, isn’t it?” Toby enquired.

“Oh, you mean you heard my crack about New York,” said Gracechurchstreet, leading the way towards the stairs. He closed the door of the room after Toby and Maverick had passed through. “I guess there was nothing in that. Just jollying the little guy along. All young boxers have America in their sights, and this one wouldn’t be any different from the rest.”

“Oh, it was just a crack, was it?”

“That’s all. Well, if it’s no use trying to persuade you to change your mind about the play, I guess we’ll be hitting the trail. Got to get along to Bampton in Oxfordshyer this afternoon. Prospecting for talent, you know.”

“Morris dancers?”

“Yay, but we’ll be right back. You know, Mr. Sparowe, we’d be kind of willing to meet you halfway, if you *did* change your mind.”

“What does that mean?” They were back in the bar. The landlord raised the flap in the counter to let them through to the customers’ side of the room.

“Mean? Well, look, suppose we agreed to scrub Charles and Nelly, like I said, would you agree to the fist-fight?”

“And what else?”

“Well, look, we couldn’t have the preacher. You’d have to substitoot for *him*. I mean to say . . .”

“I do understand your point of view, but, honestly, I think you’d better find another story. I’m sorry and all that, but—no, I’m afraid there’s nothing doing.”

“Too bad,” said Gracechurchstreet. “Oh, well, I guess you’ll be wanting to get along.” His death’s-head smile was disconcerting considering the circumstances. “One thing,” he added, with seeming irrelevance, “road-work won’t spoil the young guy’s looks, and neither will that poor old mutt that spars with him.”

CHAPTER THREE

Retort Discourteous

"If you would walk off I would prick your guts a little, in good terms, as I may."

William Shakespeare—*King Henry V*

"Say," said the Kid several mornings later, "can't we run where vere ain't no bleedin' trees?"

"Won't you tell me why you don't like trees, Dave?"

"I dunno why I don't."

"Yes, you do. You told me as much. Oh, well, never mind. Now, look, would your manager agree to my taking you in my car to a stretch where there aren't any woods?"

"'E don't rule me. Run where I like. Where you mean?"

"Here's the map. This hill is called Horsa Castle. It's quite a climb until you get to the top, but then it's fairly flat. The grass is rough, but there are no trees there. What do you say? It wouldn't take more than half an hour or so to get to it."

"O.K., Tobe, I'm agreeable."

"Those fellows who were at the pub yesterday, what's their game, Dave? Why do they want you to sweat off so much weight? I had a bit of a yarn with them in the bar after we left you yesterday. They've no real interest in your career, you know. They're in show business. Do you really have to go along with them?"

"Takin' me to America. Vat's where the big money is."

"And you think you're going to get fights there? What if they only wanted you to make a film?—and only one film, at that? Would you still want to go?"

"I dunno. Come on, Tobe. Let's get crackin'."

They got into the car and Toby drove gently across the bumpy level crossing and saluted the man with the green flag who waved him on to the road to Morchester. Two miles on the seaward side of that ancient town he turned on to a by-road and, ahead of them and to their left, rose the shadowed bulk, the carved escarpment, the mighty ramparts and ditches, of a vast Iron Age fort.

“Don’t see no castle,” said Dave.

“It’s called a castle, but it’s really an old hill-fort,” said Toby. “Pre-Roman, actually, until nearly two thousand years ago, when the Romans took it. It gave them some trouble, at that, as you can imagine.”

There were no other cars in the space which had been cleared out at the foot of the hill. It was too early in the morning and too early in the year for Horsa Castle to attract visitors. It seemed, in that age-old landscape, that the two young men had the world to themselves as they began to climb the hill. Their feet were soon soaked and their rubber-soled, smooth-worn sneakers slipped on the damp grass and, in any case, they could not run, as the slope was long and steep. When they reached the entrance to the primitive fortress they paused to take breath before they followed the path which wound in and out of a complex of ditches and mounds.

The turf on the top was rough, but the surface was comparatively flat. They jogged around the perimeter, keeping just inside the inner boundary ditch, and at the end of half an hour Dave eased off and dropped into a walk, and they returned to the western entrance.

“How long have you been in the boxing game?” asked Toby, as they made their way downhill to where they had left the car.

“Me? Oh, I dunno. Since my last year at school, really, I s’pose. We ’ad a P.E. master took an interest, so I joined a boys’ club and kep’ up with it when I left. Ven, abaht a year ago, vere was amacher bouts and I was picked for our lot at the weight—I was boxin’ welter-weight and it was on’y boys’ clubs—*you* know—and vis Mr. Gorinsky ’e come up after I’d fighted and arst me whether I’d like to turn pro.”

“You never represented London or England in an international, did you?”

“Cor, no! I ain’t international class, but I seen ’em on the telly, along wiv Mr. Gorinsky, and ’e says, ‘Wiv the right ref. you could eat that lot, boy.’ So I says, ‘As a pro. maybe I could, but vey’re flippin’ amachers and it don’t rest wiv the ref,’ I says. ‘Vere’s judges, and it’s a majority vote, and you got to keep it clean, else you’ve ’ad it.’ So ’e says, ‘Vat’s right, boy, you got to keep it clean, pro. or amacher. Vat’s the way we likes it in *my* trainin’ camp,’ ’e says. ‘Pro. fights is clean, too,’ ’e says, ‘nowadays.’”

“‘*Clean*? See ’Enry Cooper agin vat bugger of an Eye-tie?’ I arsts ’im.”

“That couldn’t happen over here,” said Toby. “How many professional fights have you had?”

“Not a bleedin’ one, not yet.”

“How’s that, then?”

“Mr. Gorinsky don’t reckon I’m ready. Anyway, ’e only wants me to ’ave one fight before we goes over to the States. Says ’e wants to keep me dark. Says I’m a prospect, see? Wants to spring me on ’em. Part of the gyme, see?”

“But will an almost unknown boxer get fights in the States? And just supposing you don’t win this preliminary bout?”

“That isn’t *my* worry, is it? Mr. Gorinsky give me ten quid a week and all fahnd, and I ’as steaks and eggs and cheese, on’y I got to get me weight dahn, see? I reckon ’e’ve got me matched at light-weight over in the States, not welter, and vat’s why I got to fine dahn.”

“You’re going to have this fight over here before you go, you say. Who with?”

“I dunno.”

Toby, suspecting that the boy was being exploited in some way, asked: “What have those men Maverick and Gracechurchstreet to do with your outfit? They’re not in the boxing game. I told you, didn’t I?”

“Sponsors, so Mr. Gorinsky says.”

“Oh, I see. They’ve got a vested interest in you, then? I guessed as much, and I *don’t* think it’s really in your boxing.”

“I dunno what vey got. I never seen ’em till vey showed up at the pub the uvver day. I reckon vey’re puttin’ up the money.”

Toby let it go at that. After all, he decided, it was really no business of his. All the same, there was an altruistic streak in his make-up which, had he chosen another profession, could have made him a good and responsible schoolmaster. He knew nothing of the dubious outskirts of professional boxing, but it appeared to him that there was something more than ordinarily fishy about the set-up at the *Swan Revived*. Gracechurchstreet had said nothing at the station house about having an interest in boxing, but he did need to stage a punch-up if he put on the play which had been outlined. Dave, Toby thought, was being used as a stool-pigeon. The chances were that he would be screened as the young Heathcote in the tavern scene and then ditched by the American. What Gorinsky’s plans for

him after that would be, was anybody's guess. On their next outing he asked:

"What was your job, Dave, before Gorinsky took you over?"

"Worked for me dad, but we 'ad a bull an' cow, so I cleared aht."

"What was the row about, then?"

"Dunno. Sommat or uvver. I forgits."

Apparently it was a painful subject. Toby accepted the implied tabu and led the conversation back to boxing.

"Where will this fight be held?"

"Ironbridge Baths."

"That's somewhere over Hoxton way, isn't it? When is it going to come off?"

"Month termorrer."

"I'd like to come along. By the way, I'm not up to much—certainly not in your class, I'm sure—but if you'd ever like an extra sparring partner . . ."

"I'd go light on yer. I'll 'ave to see what Mr. Gorinsky got to say, but I wouldn't mind a bit of a change. I gets sick of 'ittin' old 'Arry. 'E don't move 'isself, you see. The punchin'-ball is as much use to me as what 'e is—more, 'cos the ball comes back at yer, and 'e don't, see what I man?"

Having made the offer, Toby wondered whether he had made a wise move. True, he was heavier and probably, he thought, stronger than Dave. At the same time, Dave was being groomed for the professional ring, whereas he himself had never been anything but a useful amateur. However, it was impossible to back down. He did wonder, though, in what spirit Gorinsky and the trainer would look upon his offer, and to what extent Dave would hand out punishment if the offer was accepted. He need have had no qualms. Dave broke it to him most apologetically on the following morning when, having set out once more in the car, they left it on the edge of the stone-quarry north-east of Heathcote Fritzprior. They were on the far side of the dreaded woods and were jogging along a rough path over the heath when the verdict was announced.

"You know what you said?"

"Which time, Dave?"

"Abaht sparrin'. Mr. Gorinsky won't wear it. Swore at me, 'e did, when I mentioned it. I believe 'e'd of stopped me comin' aht 'smornin' if 'e'd of fought of it, 'e was so bloomin' mad. So vere ain't nuffink doin'. I

can’t go agin ’im, not wiv ’im payin’ me and fixin’ me up, and all vat. Well, *you* know.”

“Don’t give it another thought, Dave. I expect he guesses my efforts wouldn’t be much help. How do you like it out here? Easier than that climb up to Horsa Castle, what?”

“It’s all right. I don’t mind so much if vere ain’t no trees. It’s the bleedin’ trees as gits me.”

“I wonder why?”

“Oh, give over arstin’ vat! P’raps me muvver was frightened by one.” They jogged on for about half a mile, and then the boy added, “I started in arstin’ ’im for a ticket for you to see the fight, and when ’e said nuffink doin’, I reminds ’im you bin trainin’ wiv me, and ven I says as ’ow you offered to spar, and vat’s when ’e turns all narsty. Told ’im wot I fought of ’im, I did. Said you was a pal of mine, but ’e told me to shut me trap.”

“Oh, don’t worry, Dave. After all, he’s your manager, as you’ve just pointed out, so we’ll have to do things his way. He probably thinks you’d murder me, and he doesn’t want that on his conscience.” He did not see the expression on Dave’s face. They finished the rest of their training spin in silence and, still without another word from the boy except monosyllabic answers to Toby’s attempts at conversation, they drove back to the inn. Toby had just finished breakfast when there came a knock at the door. The ape-like trainer stood there.

“Come from the boss,” he said, and handed over a piece of folded paper. “’E don’t need no answer.” The note was curt to the point of insolence and embodied a most unpleasant innuendo.

“Thanks for assistance rendered, but the Kid don’t need any more road-work. We know he’s a pretty boy, but we don’t have cissies in this outfit, so kindly lay off him. Gorinsky.”

Toby thought the matter over while he finished his breakfast and washed up. Something, obviously, had upset Gorinsky. Perhaps he thought that Dave had been pumped about the London bout. If it was so, and if it mattered all that much to Gorinsky, there must be something more behind it than Dave himself knew. If Dave had asked for a ticket for Toby to see the fight, and the request had angered Gorinsky, and Toby’s offer to spar with the boy had been refused, it looked as though something about the fight was not altogether above board. That Gorinsky was not licensed seemed the obvious guess.

Toby decided upon three things. He would go over to the *Swan Revived* for his mid-morning beer as usual. He would make no reference to the letter unless Gorinsky or one of the others referred to it. He would not enter into an argument, if he could help it, if the letter was mentioned. By these means he would indicate, he thought, that he was not interested in whether he helped with Dave's training or not; added to this, he would be behaving in a dignified and detached manner; further, he would not get himself embroiled in the sort of unpleasantness which, if he read Gorinsky and the trainer aright, could turn to violence. He had no desire to get himself beaten up by East End mohocks, and, at the best, it would be two to one, even if Harry and Dave kept out of it. He had no reason to think that, in the event of a rough-house, these two, who were on Gorinsky's payroll, would come to the assistance of one who was not. Their neutrality would be the most he could count on.

On one other matter he had also made up his mind. He would go to the Ironbridge Baths on the appointed day and find some means of getting in to see the fight. He reflected that he had some small standing as a journalist, and was sufficiently acquainted with some of the sports-writing fraternity, whom he had met from time to time in a pub they frequented, to be able to count on enough assistance from the Press to get himself admitted to the hall in which the fight was to be held. He was not dependent on Gorinsky's goodwill. He would get into the baths hall in spite of him.

With this determination firmly fixed in his mind, he stepped across to the *Swan Revived*. A rhythmic thudding from the floor above the saloon bar indicated that Dave was busy. Like many peace-loving and slightly introverted persons, Toby was capable, when he felt ill-at-ease or frightened, of putting on a show of bravado. To indicate his contempt for Gorinsky's letter he decided to go up to the improvised gymnasium and, without words, to let the manager know that he despised him and was not afraid of him. He ordered his pint from Smetton and then said carelessly.

"I think, if you'll let me through, I'll go up and see how the Moonrocket's getting on."

"He's skipping," said the landlord.

"He's . . . ?" Thinking that Smetton was using the word in its slangy, metaphorical sense, Toby was somewhat startled. Smetton explained.

"He's doing his skipping exercises. Drives mother mad, that do. More than the sound of their feet on the boards when he's at sparring practice."

“Oh—skipping! Yes, of course,” said Toby. “For a moment I thought you meant . . .”

“Oh, no, they won’t be leaving here for another fortnight. Gone into Morchester, they have, Gorinsky and the trainer, to pick up the girl.”

“What girl?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Sparowe. What’s more, I don’t want her here. A boxing outfit is one thing, but a girl doesn’t have any place in it. Besides, there’s the arrangements. She’ll have to take Daffy’s room, and Daffy won’t like that.”

“What’s happened to Harry, if the others have gone off without him?”

“Playing the wag. Dolled himself up as soon as they went, swore the lad and me to keep it dark, and hired my car to go off all day on a toot. Said he was fed-up with country life and he knew the Kid would be all right with mother and me.”

“Oh, well, I’ll go up and pass the time of day. I expect Dave’s a bit browned-off, too. He may be glad to see me.”

The landlord raised the flap of the counter and Toby passed through and mounted the stairs. The door at the top was open and, as he entered the room, Dave suspended operations and tossed his skipping-rope into a corner. He was wearing boxing-shorts, a track-suit top, and plimsolls. Moodily he walked over to a stool and picked up his track-suit trousers.

“Hullo, Dave,” said Toby, from the doorway. “How’s tricks?”

The boy’s face brightened. He grinned, pulled on the trousers, seated himself, and replied,

“Tricks is a bit of orl right. Come on dahn to the bar.”

“Not going to break training, are you?”

“I’m goin’ to ’ave me a beer.”

“When the cat’s away?”

“Ah, vat’s right. Say, Tobe, you knows wot you said abaht sparrin’. Wot abaht ’aving a liddle go? Gorinsky won’t never know, and you said you would.”

“I don’t mind. You’ll have to be ladylike with me. I’m out of practice, and, anyway, I’m not in your class, I imagine.”

“Anyway, you knows enough to keep away from me, I reckon, wot is more van ’Arry can do. ’Elp wiv me footwork, if you dances abaht a bit, see?”

“I’m on, but you’ll have to postpone that pint of wallop. I’m not going to risk hitting a man who’s got a skinful of m. and b. washing about inside him.”

“*You* won’t ’it me, Tobe. Won’t get the chance. All the same, p’raps you’re right abaht the beer. O.K., ven. Strip orf, and let’s get crackin’.”

Toby went back to his house to get a pair of sneakers and his shorts. On his return he took off jacket, pullover, and shirt and picked up a spare pair of gloves. He yelled down to the landlord to come up and fix them for him and hold the watch. Nothing loth, Smetton called his wife in to look after the bar and took the stairs two at a time.

“Wot you weigh in at, Tobe?” demanded the boy.

“Eleven three on the bathroom scales this morning.”

“You looks bigger. You peels well, Tobe.”

Toby held out his hands for the gloves. Dave’s were also adjusted and Smetton, who seemed to be enjoying himself, struck a small gong. The contestants were about to set to, when Toby dropped his hands.

“Put on your headgear, Dave,” he said. “You just *might* run into an unlucky wallop. It’s better to play safe. We don’t want accidents. And use your gum-shield, too.”

“Cheese, Tobe!” protested the Moonrocket. “*You* won’t ’it me. You won’t come wivin a mile of me, don’t you worry!”

“I’m not taking chances, Dave, so belt up and do as I say.”

Before they were half-way through the first round Toby was beginning to be glad that he had insisted on the precautions. By the end of the round he was landing three punches to every one from the boy, and Dave, to his horror, was beginning to swing wildly and leave himself wide open to Toby’s scientific jabs. Worse than that, the boy was losing his temper. At the bell he slouched moodily to his corner and sat with his gloved hands dangling between his knees. His eyes were bent on the ground. Toby went over to him and said gently,

“You’re chucking your chances away, man. For goodness’ sake keep your guard up, and lead with your left. You’re not a southpaw, are you?”

“You’re too ’eavy for me, Tobe, vat’s my trouble. I’d ought to ’ave knowed.”

“I’m too *good* for you, the way you’re shaping. Come on. Let’s have another bash, and for God’s sake stop running into my right! I can’t *help* but hit you, the way you’re going about it. Look, in that first round you thought

I was easy, and so I ought to be. I haven't boxed for months. But now you've got to try harder. I mean, I *can* box, you know."

"I reckon you told me the tale when you said I 'ad to go light," muttered the boy sullenly. "Well, next rahnd I ain't goin' to go light no more. You'll take wot's comin' to you."

"O.K. But don't charge about like a blinking bull at a gate. Go all out, if you want to, and I'll try to keep out of your reach. I used to box pretty regularly, but that was three years ago. You ought to be able to murder me, and you will, if you'll only keep your head and remember what you've been taught."

"Tobe, I reckon you've led me up the garding. I fought you was my friend, but you've let me dahn."

"When you've done muttering, gentlemen," said Smetton, coming over to them, "I'll start the second round. You've had a lot more than your one-minute interval."

Toby went back to his corner and Smetton struck the gong.

"Well," he said, when, after the third disastrous round, Dave had gone off to take a shower under a home-made apparatus in the bathroom, "I dunno what *you* think, Mr. Sparowe."

"I expect you do," said Toby, in a low tone, afraid that Dave might be hanging about in order to overhear the conversation. "The poor kid's no earthly good at all. A dozen times I could have knocked him cold. He's fit enough, but he hasn't the rudiments of an idea what it's all about."

"I suppose you were well coached in your young days, Mr. Sparowe?"

"Oh, yes, I was. I boxed for the Varsity when I was up, and our instructor at school had been the middle-weight champion of his day, and one of the masters was a first-class amateur, so I was very lucky. I shouldn't think Dave has had any proper coaching at all, beyond what they taught him at school and at that boys' club he told me he joined. He'll never make a pro unless he's taken in hand pretty soon."

"Trouble is, if you ask *me*, sir, the lad can't use his head, and that don't help his fists, if you see what I mean. Dumb as a brick, so far as I can make out."

"I know. But what has his trainer been doing for him since he joined this outfit? The man ought to be crowned!"

"Search *me*! That Chris is just a big ape, and nasty with it."

“But he and Gorinsky, and even Harry, must know they’re handling a hopeless proposition.”

“Unless the lad has been told to keep himself dark, sir.”

“Dark? He’s lost in the fog. I’m very worried about him.”

“He don’t seem too happy about himself, sir.”

“No, I don’t suppose he is. I went as light as I could, but I had to stop those bull-rushes of his. When do you expect Gorinsky back?”

Before the landlord could answer this, Dave, in a towelling bath-gown, emerged from the bathroom and came back to them. He seemed to have recovered his spirits, but was still inclined to be reproachful.

“You’d ought to ’ave told me ’ow good you was,” he said. “Tell you what, Tobe. ’Ow’d you like to be me trainer ’stead of old Chris? Wot you say if I get Gorinsky to sack ’im and take you on instead?”

“Neither of them would wear it, Dave, I’m afraid. I think I’d advise you not to suggest it.”

“I’ll fink it over. And now I’m goin’ to sink me a pint, and if Gorinsky don’t like it ’e knows what ’e can do.” Dave’s air of defiance was, on the whole, rather pathetic, Toby thought. He said,

“Well, if you’ve made up your mind to a pint, I’ll certainly join you.”

“Gorinsky’s gorn to meet ’is bit of skirt orf the train,” said Dave, with apparent irrelevance.

“Oh, really? Have you met her?” Toby enquired.

“Me? No. Don’t warnt to, neever. I don’t go for dames.”

They went down to the bar, and at Smetton’s suggestion, Toby lunched with Dave at the pub before he returned to the station house. There he thought over the sparring match and the boy’s ineptitude. He decided that his guess had been right. There was not any intention on Gorinsky’s part to groom Dave for the professional ring. He was selling him to Gracechurchstreet to take a small part in a television play (the play which Toby had refused to write, but which somebody else, using Toby’s book, most probably would), and then the lad would be ditched and left to fend for himself.

Toby could think of nothing to do about this except to continue his morning visits to the bar of the *Swan Revived* and wait upon events. As for attempting to obtain an injunction to prevent his book from being used as the basis of someone else’s play, as soon as the idea crossed his mind he dismissed it. The playwright would almost certainly be an American, and

the thought of attempting litigation in the States was too alarming to be contemplated.

He had come to no other conclusion by the time he had breakfasted on the following morning, but his determination to visit the pub as usual for his midday pint had not altered.

There was time to kill before the bar of the *Swan Revived* would be open, and he did not, in any case, plan to get there much before midday. It occurred to him that his article for his aunt's magazine was not yet written and that he was short of ideas for it. He got out the car and decided to see what inspiration he could pick up on a drive round the adjacent countryside. When he returned and had put the car away, he stepped across to the pub. The bar was empty and there were none of the thudding sounds from overhead to which, during the past weeks, he had become accustomed, although he had never climbed the stairs again to see what was going on until the previous eventful day.

"Everybody out?" he asked the landlord, who appeared, somewhat tardily, from a lair at the rear after Toby had twice rapped on the counter with his half-crown.

"Out? Gone, you mean, Mr. Sparowe. Paid their reckoning almost as soon as you went off in your car this morning, and then they hopped it."

"Unexpectedly?"

"Sure. Expected them to stay another fortnight at the least. They were booked for it. And mother slaving herself to keep 'em in good hot food three times a day, and Daffy—that's her cousin—having to run in to Morchester to get in the butcher's meat and all the other stuff they wanted, and giving up her room to Gorinsky's young woman and all. Treated like princes they were, and then to go off at a minute's notice like this! It's not fair on a man, Mr. Sparowe."

"Didn't you charge them extra for going off like that without notice? You're entitled to, I believe."

"Well, I did sort of suggest it, but they turned kind of nasty on me, so I let it go. What can one man do against four of 'em, and with two women to protect? Then there was the youngster cutting up rough like that."

"Didn't the youngster go willingly, then?"

"I couldn't say. He was fighting mad this morning, that's all I know. I kept out of the way, but you could hear him all over the house."

Toby finished his pint and crossed the road to his home. The landscape was back to normal except for the new black patches which the road repairers had left. There was nobody about and the station looked lonelier and more deserted than ever. The disused railway line, rusty and weed-grown, curved away into the grey and misty distance, and nothing showed any sign of life except a disconsolate group of fir trees on a patch of sandy heathland some half a mile away. Depressed and, on Dave's account, both puzzled and worried, Toby went into his kitchen and looked disparagingly at the tins on his pantry shelf.

After a meal of tinned stewed steak with a mound of reconstituted mashed potato, followed by a couple of oranges, Toby felt a great deal more cheerful. His feeling of helplessness and insecurity vanished. The station was still on the telephone. He rang up his aunt.

"Could you have dinner with me tomorrow night at Barley's? I'll call for you at seven and bring my spot of copy with me. And could you put me up for the night? No, of course that isn't why I'm buying you a dinner! All right, then, seven sharp and I shall be wearing a lounge suit . . . Well, tell uncle to dine at his club. I want to see you alone, and, anyway, I can't afford dinner for three."

Toby had been orphaned at the age of sixteen and from that time his aunt, who had been his mother's sister, had taken on most of the responsibilities of parenthood, having no children of her own. She welcomed him when he arrived at her London house, enjoyed the dinner he gave her in Soho, but, when they had returned from it, she demanded,

"Well, and why have you come?"

"I wanted to look up a chap or two tomorrow, that's all."

"I hoped you'd found a girl down in the wilds of Dorset, and had come to ask an aunt's blessing."

"Afraid not. Anyway, please don't start all that again."

"How long do you want to stay?"

"Only this one night. But if I get a ticket to a fight in which I know one of the boxers, could you have me here again for the night in a month's time?"

"I suppose so. Since when have you taken an interest in prize-fighting?"

Toby thought it best to tell her the whole story. As he had expected, the only part which interested her was that played by Maverick and

Gracechurchstreet, and then only with regard to the commission they had offered him.

"I can't see why you won't write the thing for them," she said. "If you don't, they'll probably ask somebody else, and you'll lose five hundred dollars. I think you're being rather silly."

"But they want all kinds of impossible additions which didn't come into Heathcote's life at all."

"Couldn't you meet them half-way? Give a little, take a little, compromise here, stick your feet in there? It's always done. Look at Shakespeare."

"Aunt, dear, you have the soul of a Philistine and the morals of a—well, I'd better not say what."

"Oh, go to bed! Breakfast at eight, and you won't get it brought up to you. S.O.S. in these days means Short of Staff, so, if you don't come down for meals, you don't get them. Understand?"

"I do. Good night, then. I suppose you'll wait up for Uncle Edgar?"

"Well, not for long. I don't know when to expect him. The House is sitting late."

"Doesn't *he* get his breakfast in bed, then?"

"Yes, but I shall take it up myself. I wait on husbands, but not on nephews."

"Graceless nephews, you mean."

"I suppose you'll be here for lunch tomorrow?"

"If you won't grudge it me, yes."

"Well, mind you make yourself presentable. I've got a contributor coming."

"I thought you always saw them at your office."

"Not this one. She's far too important."

"Oh, Aunt, darling, you're not up to your tricks again, are you?"

"Wait and see. Anyway, you'd better risk it. The lunch will be rather special."

"Oh, well, it sounds as though I'm safe. You wouldn't go to that sort of trouble for a young marriageable wench who'd probably just as soon have a small slice of underdone beef and a glass of pure lemon juice."

"A girl of that age would hardly be one of my contributors, dear. By the way, I suppose you've brought your article with you? I hope it's an improvement on your last effort. I don't really know why I print you. I

suppose your rubbish gets by on the strength of your photograph at the head of your column. I must admit you're not bad-looking."

"You mean I've got that lean and hungry look which makes your readers yearn to be a mother to me?"

On the following morning, at the witching hour of eleven forty-five, he sought his cronies at their favourite pub. His particular quarry was a sports reporter named Pim Carmichael. Nobody knew this enormous man's Christian name, for Pim was short for pimple, on the principle which operates in the cases of other huge men who are known to their intimates as Tiny. Carmichael even wrote under the name of Pim. He covered boxing and motor-racing for his paper, and Toby had made his acquaintance by accident. Pim had happened to barge into Toby when the latter was conveying a pint of beer for himself and a brimming glass of vodka and vermouth for a female companion (of whom his aunt would not have approved) from a crowded bar to a small table. Pim immediately apologized, which astonished Toby, and insisted upon replacing the drinks, which astonished him still more. Their friendship dated from that hour.

At a quarter to twelve the pub was not unduly full, and Pim had not put in an appearance. Toby got himself a drink and found a table from which he could keep a strategic eye on the door. He had drunk perhaps a third of his pint and was halfway through his first cigarette when his friend appeared.

"My treat," said Toby. "What will you have?"

"You come into money or something?" asked the huge reporter, settling down to a pint with a chaser of gin.

"No. There's method in my madness. I want some information from you."

"I don't follow the gee-gees. You know that."

"This is about boxing and boxers. Do you know anything about the Moonrocket Kid?"

"Up and coming young American named Tiquico. Mexican origin, I believe. Never fought over here, but they stopped his fight with Maddeleno in the sixth round and gave the Kid the verdict."

"Not like the Americans to stop a fight, is it?"

"They say Maddeleno will never box again."

"How old is the Kid?"

“Twenty-three. Heavyweight. They’re waiting until Cooper retires, and then they’ll match him over here.”

“It seems he’s got a namesake over here already.”

“How’s that?”

Toby explained all the circumstances under which he had made Dave’s acquaintance.

“Well, I suppose there’s no copyright in names,” said the reporter slowly, “but I thought everybody in boxing circles had heard of the Moonrocket Kid. Besides, why would a British boxer be named after the moon rocket? It doesn’t make sense. Another thing: we don’t usually give our boxers fancy names, anyway. Henry Cooper, Jack Bodell, Brian Curvis, Howard Winstone, Chic Calderwood, Bob Fitzsimmons, Phil Scott, Jimmy Revie, Billy Walker, Jimmy Wilde—see what I mean? It’s in wrestling you get the flowery monikers. What did you say this young chap’s manager was called?”

“Gorinsky. Reuben Gorinsky. His trainer is a plug-ugly called Chris—an ex-pro, I rather fancy—and he’s only allowed one sparring partner, a poor old wreck named Harry who must be pushing fifty. I don’t know either of their surnames. Come to that, I don’t know young Dave’s surname, either.”

“And you say they’ve booked this youngster to fight in London?”

“Yes, on the twenty-fourth of next month at the Ironbridge Baths.”

“They’ll be lucky!”

“How do you mean?”

“The Ironbridge Baths don’t close for the winter. They’re of international standard and they’re used for training international class swimmers. You must have got the name wrong. It couldn’t be the Ironbridge Baths.”

“I’m certain I haven’t got it wrong. They’re down Hoxton way somewhere, aren’t they, these baths?”

“That’s right. You know, Toby laddie, loth though I am to think ill of my fellow-creatures, I’d say your Reuben Gorinsky is a slightly shady customer. Professional boxing is very well controlled nowadays, but it still has its fringes, no doubt. Tell me the tale, laddie. What goes forward, do you think?”

“Well, I hardly know. I mean, I’m not in a position to form an opinion. I think the boy is being exploited in some way, but he seems pretty well

satisfied with his lot."

"Who told you he was booked to fight at the Ironbridge Baths?"

"He told me so himself, and there's no doubt he believed it. Apart from the fact that I didn't like the manager or the trainer, young Dave can't box. Then there's this business of the sponsors. I don't like them, either, and I don't believe they're interested in professional boxing. There's some other game afoot."

"Who would they be?"

Toby gave his friend an account of the call he had received from Maverick and Gracechurchstreet and of their offer to finance a play based on the life of William Heathcote.

"And you can see—at least, *I* can—a sort of tie-up," he concluded. "They want a fight in a pub and they have connected themselves with Gorinsky, who can produce a young, very good-looking boxer. I rather think they're going over my head in the matter of turning my book into a play and are featuring Dave as the young hero. If so, they're up against two obstacles. First, I shan't agree to their adapting my book to their rotten, sentimental ideas, that's if they have the decency to ask me, of course, and they probably won't—second, if they think young Dave is capable of learning even a couple of lines of dialogue, let alone picking up his cues and timing his entrances, they've got a big headache looming."

CHAPTER FOUR

Lunch With a Crocodile

"Give what you give freely and heartily, but give your guests credit for knowing their stomachs better than you do."

Anon.—*The Analysis of the Hunting Field*, 1846

Any ideas that Toby might have had about meddling in Dave's affairs were dispelled (for a time) in amazed contemplation of his aunt's luncheon guest. This was an incredibly elderly female whose yellow hands and wrists reminded him of the wings of a pterodactyl and whose clothes came, as P. G. Wodehouse would put it, from another and a dreadful world. Added to this, she cackled in an unnerving manner at what he thought were his most original and penetrating remarks, and for a time made him feel like a six year old who had come to table with illicit jam on his face.

In spite of all this, he liked her. Moreover, he felt that this (to him) irrational sentiment was returned. It transpired, during the course of conversation, that she possessed grandsons and grandnephews of about his age and was expecting a great-grandson in the near future. Toby was emboldened to put to her the case of young Dave and his fears concerning the boy. She listened without interrupting him and waved a yellow claw imperiously at his aunt when that relative attempted to stem the flow of Toby's eloquence.

"Do you enjoy guessing games, Mr. Sparowe?" she asked, when he had finished.

"I'm not much good at them," said Toby. "How do you mean, Dame Beatrice? By the way, didn't you, some years back, cure a friend of mine of claustrophobia?"

"If the two men who came to see you about a play had not been involved with your young boxer, would you have been as much concerned about him as you are?" asked Dame Beatrice, ignoring his second question.

"Is that the guess you suggest I should make? If so, I can't think of any answer."

"Take time to think, and then let me hear the steps you take in your reasoning."

“You listened very attentively and patiently to the story, Dame Beatrice. May I believe that you were interested in it?”

“Certainly you may. It fascinates me. Please fire away.”

“I’m probably not going to be very logical. Putting all the pieces together, I think I would still have felt some concern for young Dave, even if Maverick and Gracechurchstreet had no connection with the gang which is running him. I mean, I know nothing about what goes on behind the scenes in the lower grades of professional boxing, but it seems to me to be plain idiocy to think you can train a professional boxer in the kind of outfit they’re employing. Surely the lad needs more than one sparring-partner, for instance? In any case, the one they’ve given him is so much past it that he’s no use, anyway. Neither, incidentally, is the trainer. Then, if I hadn’t been there, I don’t think the lad would have got any road-work. He’s agoraphobic, as I think I told you.”

“I think you said that he is particularly adversely affected by woodlands and belts of trees. That is not what is meant, broadly speaking, by agoraphobia. It is much more likely to be the result of some experience in early childhood, I fancy, but, of course, that is only a theory. Pray continue.”

“Well, I got the general impression that Dave was being exploited by this gang. I did not take to his manager, Gorinsky, and his trainer, as I said, is a dud.”

“I believe that exploitation of the innocent is not uncommon among unscrupulous promoters of professional sport.”

“Then I thought the Kid was rather young to be matched against plug-uglies who would know every dirty trick in the game. He is a fine, beautifully-built lad, but he hasn’t a clue about boxing. Even if he had, I didn’t like their idea that they’d got to get his weight down. He struck me as being as fine-drawn as a prize greyhound already, and it can be terribly weakening to get down to a lot below your natural weight. It’s not like an overweight person trying to slim a bit. *That* might be all to the good, but I’m convinced that *this* wasn’t. Well, so much for my thoughts about the set-up at the *Swan Revived*.”

“They seem to have been most reasonable and comprehensible, and do great credit to your kindness of heart.”

“Thank you,” said Toby, uncomfortably. “Well, add the other two oddities, Maverick and Gracechurchstreet, and the fact that I was given

(which means Dave himself was given) wrong information about where the fight was to be held, and the whole thing looks to me somewhat more than fishy."

"And your aim is to perform a deed of knight-errantry and rescue this unfortunate child from devouring monsters?"

"Put like that, it does sound a bit like Tom Brown and Little Arthur, I admit."

"Nonsense! It does you great credit, as I said before. There is too little chivalry and selflessness in today's materialistic world. Do you care to have me help you in your salvage operations? I have certain contacts and connections which might be put to some use if you would allow me to have a finger in this not uninteresting pie."

"I say, would you really help me? You see, the trouble is that, now the Ironbridge Baths is a dead end, I don't see how I'm to get on the trail again."

"You know the manager's name, and that his assistants are named Harry and Chris, and you have given a clear description of the three. They should not be difficult to trace."

"Not if one knew the sleazy circles in which they probably move, but that's the snag, isn't it?"

"I will find out what my son can do to help us. He has successfully defended many persons of doubtful antecedents and dubious reputation. Pimps, trulls, and trollops, in short. Among them there should be those who would be willing to give him a little information of the kind we need."

"Your son?"

"Sir Ferdinand Lestrange, Q.C. Another thing: one of my closest friends is an Assistant Commissioner of Police. Oh, I think we shall manage to trace the probably unsavoury Mr. Gorinsky and his associates, if you really think it would be wise to do so."

Toby returned to his railway station and a week later he received a telephone call.

"Dame Beatrice Lestrange Bradley's secretary speaking. Will you come to lunch at the Stone House, Wandles Parva, near Brockenhurst?"

"Thank you very much. When?"

"Today, if you like. If not, when will you be free?"

"I can come today."

“Right. One o’clock for half-past. Do you need directions?”

“No, thanks. I can find my way. I’ll come by Wimborne and Ringwood and drop down through Burley. Thanks again.”

The Stone House was a squarely-built Georgian residence standing at the end of a lane which started as a footpath across a common and ended at a junction with one of the two roads to the village. It stood in its own grounds, which were not too spacious for a gardener and a gardener’s boy to cope with, and its stables had been converted into a double garage which had then been turned back into stabling and a new garage built, incorporating the old coach house.

Toby, who had allowed plenty of time for a drive of approximately forty-five miles, realized that he was too early for his one o’clock appointment. He identified the house, then drove past it, parked his car at the end of the lane and strolled over to the right bank of a little, brown, woodland river. There was a wooden bridge. He was standing on this and looking down at the water when, from the direction opposite to that which he had taken, there appeared an Amazonian, comely woman who was accompanied by a gigantic dog. As it walked with its muzzle apparently glued to the woman’s left hip-bone and showed no sign of abandoning this position as they crossed the bridge, Toby left them a clear passage by removing himself to a little wood of greyish, stunted oak trees which bordered the stream at this point.

“Good morning,” said the woman. “Sorry Fergus hasn’t the good manners to leave people room on the bridge.”

“Sticks to his job,” said Toby, raising his hat, “and in the circumstances, I can’t say I blame him.” At this, the woman stopped short.

“I say,” she said, “haven’t I spoken with you very recently on the telephone?”

“The only person who has spoken with me very recently on the telephone is somebody with your voice who called herself secretary to Dame Beatrice Lestrange Bradley.”

“That’s it. You’re Mr. Sparowe. I’m Laura Gavin. How do you do?”

“How do you do, Mrs. Gavin? Incidentally, during lunch at my aunt’s place, Dame Beatrice was persuaded to call me Toby.”

“All right, then, Toby it is.”

“And—Mrs. Gavin?”

“Laura is all right to any friend of Dame B. Come on. Time for the short snort before lunch.”

“I’ve got my car parked on the common. May I convey you?”

“Fergus knows his way home, but he won’t leave me, I’m afraid, so I’ll have to walk.”

“Doesn’t he care for riding in cars?”

“He adores it. Dogs do.”

“I shall be honoured to have him as my back-seat passenger.”

The Irish wolfhound was in favour of this arrangement. The moment Toby opened the back door of the car he gently entered and settled himself along the upholstery.

“You’re accepted,” said Laura, “but you’ve yet to see the slave mentality which lies behind those amber eyes. He tolerates and looks after me because he thinks I’m an adjunct (albeit an unimportant one) to Mrs. Croc. Otherwise, in his opinion, I wouldn’t exist.” She got into the car and Toby, grateful for this auspicious introduction to his visit, drove to the Stone House.

Laura had a key, but apparently their arrival had been noted, for, before she could insert it, they were admitted by a dark-eyed, black-browed servant whose Gallic shrewdness took in Toby with one quick head-to-shoes glance. She said,

“Madame is in the small drawing-room. I shall announce monsieur?”

“No, don’t bother,” said Laura. “This way, Toby.”

“Ah!” said his hostess, from a small armchair. “So the mountain has come to Mahomet. Laura, dear child, give Mr. Sparowe a drink.”

“He’s Toby, so he told me,” said Laura, “and he may as well help himself and us, since I imagine that we shall soon know him as well as we know ourselves. He seems that sort to me.”

Toby bowed and went across to the small table where the drinks were set out. The wolfhound, who had once again glued himself to Laura, now left her and walked sedately across to the seated witch, at whom, before putting his head on her knee, he gazed with unstinted adoration.

“You’d think he’d been parted from her for at least a month,” said Laura. “Sherry for Mrs. Croc., Toby, and a whisky sour for me. It’s not as though she cares tuppence about him, either.”

“If that were true, it would be most ungrateful of me,” said Dame Beatrice. She fondled the hound’s rough head. “Like old brandy, he

improves upon acquaintance. And now, my dear Toby, we have your affairs in hand, but will postpone discussion of them until after lunch."

Lunch, prepared by a vast, smiling Frenchman whom Toby asked permission, when the meal was over, to congratulate, was served by the elderly maid who had opened the door to him and Laura. Coffee was taken in the small drawing-room where a pleasant fire blazed and through whose windows a thin, pale sunshine was creeping in as though unsure of its welcome.

"You mean you have some news for me?" asked Toby. "You haven't tracked down Dave and Gorinsky yet, surely?"

"With curious and interesting results. I imagine you are far too young to remember the boxing booths at fairs?"

"A fiver, or whatever it was, if you could stay three rounds against some ex-professional? I've heard of them. But—good Lord! You don't mean that's the way they're going to employ young Dave! A kid of his age couldn't stand it! Do you mean he has to take on all comers, no matter what their weight, and lay them out in three rounds? Why, he might be asked to fight a dozen times or more in a single afternoon or evening! It's a game for old professionals who may be past it so far as prize-fights are concerned, but who know every low trick in the game and can always win. It's not for an untrained youngster of Dave's age! Do they want to murder the kid?"

"Ultimately they want him to appear in a film."

"Yes, I'd guessed as much, as I think I've told you. Then why the boxing booths?"

"Ah, that is where your acquaintances Gracechurchstreet (that is an assumed name, incidentally—he was born a member of the mighty clan of the Smiths) and Maverick come in. The manager, Reuben Gorinsky, is their employee and is aiding and abetting their enterprise. The boxing-booth fights are not what you imagine. They are merely exhibition matches and Dave always has the same opponent. He is carefully rehearsed in what he has to do, this is filmed and it will become part of the story they intend to portray, whatever that story may be. At least, so I am told. I reserve judgment."

"Does Dave know that's what's happening and that they've no intention of letting him fight professionally?"

"I have no information on that score."

"Has this boxing-booth business actually started?"

“I do not know. I understand that the contract (if such it can be called) was made in London.”

“Dave will be pretty sore about it when he finds out what’s happening. I suppose sooner or later it will dawn on even a bonehead like him that he’s simply being used for this film and that, as soon as they don’t need him any more, they’ll ditch him. I suppose you weren’t told whereabouts in London they are?”

“According to my information, they left London with a small travelling fair several days ago, and are now somewhere in Yorkshire. They were last heard of near Doncaster, but are hardly likely to be still in that neighbourhood, as the fair may well have travelled many miles since then, and may be heading for Leeds, if my information is to be relied on.”

“Well, I’ve a double interest in all this, Dame Beatrice. You remember, perhaps, that I told you about the visit Maverick and Gracechurchstreet paid me at my railway station? Well, I think this business of filming Dave’s sparring-matches ties up very neatly with their idea that I should write them this play. I wouldn’t consider the thing, so they’re going about getting what they want in their own way, and I’m not going to have it. My biography of William Heathcote is copyright, and I’m not giving them permission to muck about with it.”

“Or Dave?”

“Yes—or Dave. From what I’ve found out he’s not even a top-class amateur boxer, let alone capable of being trained as a likely professional. He’s done nothing but boys’ club boxing . . .”

“That’s not to say he isn’t any good,” put in Laura.

“Well, I’m afraid he isn’t, but they’re not concerned with that. They simply want to use him for this putrid film of theirs, and then they’ll ditch him. I know his type. He’ll go dumb mad and commit a crime, as likely as not, just to get his own back on a world which, he’ll feel, has let him down. I’ve got to get to him and hike him out of it before that happens. I’ve a friend living in Hawes who’ll put me up while I make a few enquiries. I can’t tell you how grateful I am, Dame Beatrice, for the information you’ve dug up.’

“No thanks are due to me. It was all done by . . .”

“Remote control,” said Laura, grinning. “What makes you think young Dave might turn to crime?”

“He’s inarticulate.”

“Is that germane to the issue?”

“It might well be,” said Dame Beatrice.

“I see. He says it in punch-ups,” said Laura.

“If it was going to stop at that, it wouldn’t be so bad. I’m afraid he might go haywire and really slug somebody,” said Toby.

“Oh, I see. Yes, that *would* be awkward.”

“So I think I ought to get along up there before he starts getting himself into trouble.”

“I don’t see what you can do.”

“I can at least go to Yorkshire and make some enquiries. It’s up to me, now. I can’t expect any more help from Dame Beatrice, and I don’t intend to ask for it. It’s a straight issue between Dave and myself.”

“He may have signed a contract with Gorinsky.”

“Well, I’m afraid he has. He told me so.”

“In law, Dave is classed as an infant until he attains the age of twenty-one,” said Dame Beatrice, “unless they change the age to eighteen.”

“An apprentice can be bound by contract.”

“Yes, he can, because the contract is held to be of benefit to him. Would a contract to accept Gorinsky as his manager be held to benefit Dave, I wonder? It *could* be so argued, I suppose. It is a nice point.”

“But if Gorinsky is guilty of false representation, what then?” asked Toby.

“The falseness of the representation no doubt would need to be proved. In any case, the contract would be rendered void if it could be shown that its terms were onerous and, in this particular case, I think those would be the lines to pursue.”

“Well, I’m going to begin by pursuing Dave himself,” said Toby, “and we’ll see where that will get us.”

“Tell me *exactly* what Gracechurchstreet wanted you to do for him and his friend. You mentioned a play. Can you be more specific?” asked Dame Beatrice.

“Yes, certainly. They found out that I’ve written and published a life of our local poet, William Heathcote, and that I belong—or did, until I moved out of London—to an amateur dramatic society for which I’d made a dramatised version of *A Tale of Two Cities*. They wanted me to do a play based on my Heathcote book. I’d have been quite willing if they’d been prepared to accept an authentic version, because, apart from the money, as a

matter of fact his life-story wouldn't make at all a bad play, but they wanted to include some fictional additions which were unnecessary and absurd, and to which I couldn't possibly agree."

"What fictional additions?" asked Laura.

"They wanted me to have Heathcote knock down Charles the Second in a pub brawl after compliments had been paid to Nell Gwynn."

"Oh, dear!"

"Charles would have been incognito, of course, and Heathcote had no idea who his opponent was, but, for knocking him down, Heathcote was to be transported."

"*Was* he transported?—in actual fact, I mean?"

"Yes, he was, and not for knocking anybody down, but for killing a man quite wantonly, and, needless to say, it was *not* Charles the Second. As for Nell Gwynn, she doesn't come into the picture either."

"No, one would surmise that. So you turned down the whole idea of writing them the play. Good for you!" said Laura.

"What else could I do? I wasn't going to write rubbish like that and let them call it history!"

"Where were they proposing to produce the play?" asked Dame Beatrice.

"In America, as part of a mixed grill which included folk, morris, and sword dances, some phoney, pepped-up English local customs, and a lot of ballyhoo which wouldn't have taken in a child of six. They must think the great American public needs its head examined."

"Interesting," said Dame Beatrice.

"Did you, while they were with you, conclude that it was a lot of ballyhoo?" enquired Laura.

"To be honest, no, I didn't. I didn't pay much attention to that aspect of it because I was so much exercised in my mind about the play. It was when I began to think about it seriously, after I discovered that they were in with Gorinsky and his mob, that it came to me how phoney the whole interview had been."

"Not altogether, if their object was to present your young friend as a juvenile William Heathcote," Dame Beatrice pointed out. "The connecting link between them and Gorinsky could be that, as you have indicated, they needed a good-looking young boxer and that he could supply that need.

Would it really be such a bad thing for Dave? At least it would take him to America, where he wants to go."

"Well, I had thought of that, as a matter of fact, and I suppose one could keep an open mind about it. A journalist friend of mine—a sports reporter—thought the set-up might be fishy, but he had nothing in particular to go on, except what I was able to tell him, and that, as you see, isn't much."

"How long was your play to be?" asked Laura.

"Yes, that's another thing," Toby replied. "They wanted it to run for an hour and fifteen minutes. Well, you couldn't possibly compress the story of William Heathcote into *that* bit of time. It needs three acts, one including the brawl and the sentence of transportation—and *that* means two separate scenes—another act depicting his life in Virginia, and a third act to show his return home, his marriage, and his poetry. You couldn't possibly cram all that into seventy-five minutes. Three hours would be more like it."

"Is Gorinsky's wife to be Nell Gwynn?" asked Laura. "You did say he had a wife, didn't you?"

CHAPTER FIVE

A Confusion of Cars

"Thus, gentlemen, have I endeavoured to lay before you some observations upon this transaction, and I hope you will think them not unworthy of your consideration."

Serjeant Hayward, at *the trial of Mary Blandy 1752*

"A wife?" asked Toby. "Well, he has what Dave refers to as a bit of skirt, but she seems to have occupied a separate room, and, anyway, I don't remember mentioning her."

"Laura sometimes has second sight," said Dame Beatrice, with an eldritch cackle.

"As a matter of fact, he and the trainer went to meet her off the train at Morchester station the day before they all left Heathcote Fitzprior, but I saw nothing of her. It was extremely odd, the way they all pushed off. They'd taken the rooms for another fortnight, and I'm sure Dave would have told me, if he'd known they were moving out so soon. Whatever it was that decided them must have happened that same day, but, unless it was connected with the lady, I don't see what it could have been. According to the landlord, they hadn't had a letter, a telegram, or a phone call, and they *had* arranged for the woman to stay at the pub," said Toby.

"It sounds to me as though their plans were cut and dried, and the arrangement with the landlord to stay another fortnight was a blind," said Laura.

"Yes, but *why*? And, in that case, why bring Gorinsky's girl to the pub?"

"As I see it," said Dame Beatrice, "and failing, in the light of our present knowledge, any other explanation, it does seem as though your own presence, and your championship of the young boxer, may have been the deciding factor."

"But I wasn't doing the Kid any harm! I only intended to help a bit over his training. There's no doubt he's an agoraphobe."

"From what you have told me, I still doubt whether that is quite the correct diagnosis."

"How do you mean? You suggested that, I remember."

“It seemed to me, from your description of his reactions, that it is not precisely open spaces that he dreads. His fear is of woods. I have been studying the one-inch map of the district, and, taken in conjunction with your account of the route you took on your first training run with him, he showed no fear or reluctance until you came in sight of what is marked on my map as Sandy Copse. Is that correct?”

“Well, yes, it is. I thought that having me with him on the road and the open heath would give him confidence. I was surprised when he suddenly jibbed at the sight of the trees.”

“Just so. And on another run you drove to Morchester, I assume, and then on to Horsa Castle. Were there any repercussions, so to speak?”

“No, none that I noticed. He had asked, as a matter of fact, whether we could run where there were no trees, so I thought Horsa Castle would be just the job.”

“And so it proved; yet, if the boy is a true agoraphobe, I can imagine few places more calculated to drive such an unfortunate subject hysterical with terror. It is vast, it is lonely and, even to persons with a well-balanced nervous system, I have known it to be uncomfortably oppressive.”

“Nearly always seems to be in shadow, even on a sunny day,” put in Laura. “I’d never go there alone, and I’m not fanciful—well, not about wide open spaces.”

“Maybe, if he was brought up in London’s East End, he’d have a *thing* about woods,” suggested Toby. “Could that be it?” He himself thought the suggestion ridiculous, and it seemed that Laura agreed.

“I thought all East Enders at least knew Epping Forest,” she said, “and, anyway, kids nowadays have motor-bikes and get around, don’t they? They roar down to Brighton, and so forth, and make themselves pests when they get there, and all that sort of thing. Dave wouldn’t have stayed bottled up in Whitechapel, or wherever it was.”

“Well, all this doesn’t help me,” said Toby, “so I shall go to Yorkshire and find out what I can. There *must* be something fishy going on, or why should Gorinsky have told Dave that there was going to be this fight at the Ironbridge Baths, when he must have known that those baths are kept open all the winter for swimmers? It seems to me there’s something worth investigating, and I’m jolly well going to find out what it is.”

When Toby left the Stone House it was with that feeling of importance and self-satisfaction which comes to unpractical persons faced with

something definite and concrete to get on with. He was a man of action, he decided. It was an ennobling thought.

He returned to the railway station at Heathcote Fitzprior full of zeal, self-confidence, and resolution and began to prepare for his journey. Then, his luggage and his golf-clubs in the boot of his car, his contribution to his aunt's journal in the post, and a copy of *The Life of William Heathcote* in his brief-case on the back seat, he set out for Shaftesbury, Salisbury, and Oxford. He proposed to branch off just before he reached Northampton and take the Ml to where it fused with the Al. He came off Al north of Boroughbridge and put up for the night at Ripon after a long day's driving, intending to reach his friend's house at a reasonable hour on the following morning.

The friend, whose name was Aysbury, welcomed him and applauded his foresight in bringing his golf-clubs, but was dubious concerning his prospects of succeeding in his main enterprise.

"I doubt whether you'd find a travelling fair on the roads much before Easter," he said, "and then it would be in the mining districts, most likely. What's the name of it, anyway?"

Toby was compelled to admit that he did not know.

"It's only a one-horse sort of outfit, apparently," he said, "but one of the side-shows is a boxing-booth."

"Why do you want to catch up with it? Looking for a job?"

Toby told him the story and found it met with a mixture of pity and ribaldry. He was advised to forget the whole thing and settle down to a fortnight's golf. But for the mists of cloud-cuckoo which had caused him to contribute his column to his aunt's journal so that he could indulge his hobby of writing biography instead of taking a job, he might well have accepted his friend's advice, but, having settled on a quixotic course of action, he was not prepared to abandon it until he had proved to himself that it was useless. Obviously it would be a waste of time and petrol to attempt to scour a county the size of Yorkshire in quest of an obscure and (so far) nameless travelling fair, so, on the following morning, having promised that he would play golf in the afternoon, he took himself off for a solitary spin in order to think out a possible plan. His intention was to drive out into the countryside, park the car and then cogitate while he walked.

He stopped just east of Aysgarth to look at the falls, and turned north at Leyburn and west to Reeth. At the inn at Muker he went in for a drink,

left the car and walked the Buttertubs Pass so named because of the extraordinary holes, deep and terrifying, which penetrated far down into the limestone. It occurred to him that he need not have taken the car, since the Pass connected Hawes with Muker, but his main object had been to secure his privacy, since, had he mentioned the Pass, he was pretty sure that Aysbury would have offered to accompany him instead of playing his morning round of golf, for, although he had made Toby's visit an excuse for taking a fortnight of the annual leave due to him from his firm, and proposed to spend most of it in improving his game, he did not intend to neglect his duties as host.

Toby had reached Hardraw Force before an idea came to him. He had made up his mind to take the moorland road to Askrigg, keeping north of the Ure, and then to cross Askrigg Common past Oxnop Beck Head and High Oxnop and so return to the car by the road through Swaledale along which he had already driven that morning. However, fired with success at having found a course of action in the matter of tracing Dave, he stopped when he reached the magnificent Force as it crashed into a boiling pool below, turned, after he had stood awhile in awe of the ninety-five-foot fall of the water, and went back by the way he had come. An advertisement in the newspapers was the solution to his problem, he had decided.

The cottage, as he had expected, was empty except for the woman who "did" for Aysbury daily, so he went into the only downstair room the cottage boasted (apart from the kitchen regions) and sat down to compose his advertisement. He did not know which newspapers the Gorinsky camp followed, but decided that none of them was likely to be *The Times*. The evening papers were the most probable, he thought. When he had worded the advertisement to his liking, he enclosed it with a covering letter to his friend Pim Carmichael in Fleet Street to ask him to get it inserted in the London evening dailies and in any magazine devoted to the interests of professional boxing, and to send him the bill, the advertisement to run for a week. He posted it, played golf better than usual that afternoon, went to bed pleased with himself, and was content to wait with some degree of patience for the result of his venture.

In obedience to the natural law (Parkinson fashion) which decrees that when an indecisive person takes decisive action, something utterly unforeseen will result, five days later Toby and his friend were at breakfast when a caller was announced.

“Police—wi’ warrant,” said Mrs. Thirsk. “Wheer ’as tha bin sin’ ah saw thee? Happen thee’s under arrest!” There was nothing dour about Mrs. Thirsk. She enjoyed a joke. “What ’ast tha bin a-doin’ of, eh?”

“Oh, show them in,” said Aysbury, “and hurry up!”

His domestic help favoured him with a pitying smile and went out, slamming the door behind her.

“What’s all this, then?” asked Toby.

“The Thirsk’s idea of a joke, I hope and trust,” said Aysbury. At this Mrs. Thirsk flung open the door and, after announcing. “Inspector Battersby and Sergeant Ossett,” closed it by kicking it to, and then stood with arms akimbo behind the visitors, both of whom were in plain clothes.

“All right, Mrs. Thirsk, that will do,” said Aysbury, rising from the table. “Good morning, Inspector . . . Sergeant . . . What can I do for you? Mrs. Thirsk mentioned a warrant. She didn’t mean it, of course?”

“No, sir. Just my official card.” The inspector produced it. “Would one of you gentlemen be Mr. Sparowe?”

“Yes,” said Toby. “Did I park my car in the wrong place?”

“My business, sir, is in connection with a newspaper advertisement under your name and giving this address. Mention is made of a man named Gorinsky and another man named Gracechurchstreet. You seem to wish to get in touch with them.”

“Well, yes, I do.”

“Perhaps you would tell me why you wish to contact them, sir.”

Toby embarked upon the story which it seemed to him he must already have recounted fifty times. The inspector allowed him to finish before he put any questions to him, but during the narration disquietingly made notes in a small black book. At the end he said,

“I don’t quite see why you inserted your advertisement, sir. It appears, from your own account, that you had only casually met these men and this young boxer you mention. What is your special interest in them? Why do you wish to contact them again?”

Toby, remembering the wording of Gorinsky’s insolent note, felt himself flushing.

“I thought the boy was being exploited,” he said. The inspector looked at him.

“Did he complain to you?” he asked.

“Well, no. In fact, he seemed pretty pleased with life. He was well fed, of course—much better fed than ever before, I shouldn’t wonder—but—well—”

“Well, what, sir?”

“Look here,” said Toby, “perhaps, before we go any further, you wouldn’t mind telling me what this is all about!”

“Not just at the moment, sir. It may be in your own interests that I should not. Now, if I’ve got your story correctly, you last saw Gorinsky, Scouse . . .”

“Who’s Scouse?”

“First name Christopher.”

“Oh, Chris the trainer, yes.”

“Biddle, first name Henry . . .”

“Harry the sparring partner, yes.”

“Clement Gracechurchstreet, alias Clement Smith, and John O’Mara Maverick, alias Ignatius Clancy . . .”

“Enough aliases to fill the police files, what!”

“No, sir,” said the inspector, rebuking the flippant tone. “The aliases appear to have been assumed for business reasons only. There was nothing criminal involved, so far as we know. Now, sir, please think this over carefully. You first saw Mr. Gorinsky and his associates—when?”

“I suppose it would have been that day when I went to the pub and saw them in the bar—not Maverick and Gracechurchstreet, but the other four.”

“The date, sir?”

“Oh, Lord! What’s today?”

“Monday, March thirteen, sir.”

“Well, I’ll do my best to work it backwards, if it’s really important. The day after I arrived here . . .”

“Does not concern us, sir.”

“Oh, well, anyway, all I did was to go for a short drive and take a walk along the Buttertubs Pass. I arrived here five days ago at somewhere around half past ten in the morning, having spent the night at Ripon.”

“Which hotel, sir?”

“The *Dean and Chapter*. It’s all right. I signed the book.”

“Of course, sir. So you spent the night of March six in Ripon. Get there in time for dinner, sir?”

“Just about.”

“And after dinner, sir?”

“Well, I’d been driving best part of the day. It’s a fair stretch from my home in Dorset to Ripon, you know—round about three hundred miles, the way I came—and I was pretty tired, so at just before ten I turned in. I had breakfast at nine the next morning and then came on here.”

“I see, sir. Now, the day before you left home. What happened then?”

“Nothing much. I finished my regular article for my aunt’s magazine, went over to the pub as usual, drove into Morchester for lunch—I’d cleared up most of the food I had in the house in preparation for coming on holiday, you see—went home to pack my things, crossed over to the pub in the evening to ask Smetton—that’s the landlord—to keep half an eye on my place while I was away, came back after I’d had a couple of drinks, and went to bed, intending to make an early start next day.”

“And did you make an early start, sir?”

“Well, you know how it is. One thinks one will, but, as a matter of fact, I suppose it was turned eleven before I finally got away.”

“I see, sir. That takes us back to March five, the day you did your packing.”

“Yes, well, the day before that, I had lunch with Dame Beatrice Lestrange Bradley at her home in the New Forest.”

“Exact address, sir?”

“Oh, surely you know Dame Beatrice! Important public figure. My aunt kow-tows to her even before Dame Beatrice comes in sight.”

“If you would supply me with her address, sir.”

“The Stone House, Wandles Parva, Hampshire.”

“That is correct, sir.”

“Well, of course it’s correct! Don’t you believe I went there? Look here, what *is* all this?”

“All in good time, sir. You lunched with Dame Beatrice on March four. Would you remember which day of the week that was?”

“And supposing I can’t?”

“It wouldn’t make a great deal of difference, I daresay, sir, but, for your information, it was a Thursday.”

“All this checking the credibility of the witness is a bit galling, you know, Inspector. Exactly what am I suspected of having done?” Toby felt himself beginning to panic.

“Nobody is suspected of *anything*, sir, so far as I know at present, but a crime may have been committed, and we are engaged upon a series of enquiries which should lead us to a conclusion as to whether or not such has been the case. Well, as I said, March four was a Thursday . . .”

“Ah, now, that’s funny! It was a Thursday, and that brings it all back, because it was on a Thursday that Gracechurchstreet and Maverick first called on me, and it was on the following Thursday week that I first met Dame Beatrice at lunch.”

“I thought that was at her home, and on March four, sir.”

“That was the second time. The first time was at my aunt’s flat in London. I had no idea it was Dame Beatrice I was going to meet. My aunt had said that one of the contributors to her magazine was coming, and it turned out to be Dame B. I got her interested in the Gorinsky party’s disappearance, and it was when I went to lunch with her at her own house later on that I learned that the party were probably up here in Yorkshire. Her son’s a Q.C. and has defended lots of shady characters and got them off, so he has plenty of friends in the underworld who’ll give him information without prejudice, so to speak, and I’d long formed the opinion that Gorinsky’s mob *were* shady characters.”

“So you would claim to be a friend of Dame Beatrice Lestrange Bradley, would you, sir?”

“Well, I’ve only met her twice, of course, but she seemed very cordial.”

“Just so. Well, now, sir, perhaps we can get to what I really want to know. Can you work out, from what you have already recollected, on which day you last saw the party in whom we are interested?—namely, Mr. Gorinsky.”

“Yes, I can. A week back from March four would be—let’s see now —”

“February twenty-five, sir, as this is not a leap year.”

“And two weeks back from twenty-five is eleven, so Gracechurchstreet and Maverick called on me on Thursday, Feb. eleven and on the very next day, Friday, Feb. twelve, I saw Gorinsky and the other three—the trainer, the sparring-partner, and the boy—in the bar at the *Swan Revived*.”

“And you never saw Mr. Gorinsky again?”

“No, I don’t believe I did. Why, does it matter?”

“You didn’t see him when the party left the *Swan Revived* for London? We understand that they went to London after they left the inn.”

“I didn’t see *any* of them. I went for a drive to pass away the time until the hour for my elevenses arrived, and when I got back to the pub the birds had flown and the landlord was left with a gilded cage and no *oiseaux*. Heartbroken, he was, poor chap. He’d expected them to stay another fortnight, particularly as Gorinsky’s girl-friend was joining them.”

“Which of them *did* you see during that week?”

“So far as I remember, two only, young Dave and the trainer. I was out jogging with Dave on the Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. Then on Tuesday, after I got back, the trainer brought me a rather insolent note from Gorinsky to tell me that my services were no longer required. I didn’t see anything more of any of them, except the boy, and when I went next to the *Swan Revived* they’d all gone.”

“And what brought you to Yorkshire, sir? I still don’t understand why you interested yourself in the party to the extent of advertising in several evening papers and also in a journal devoted to professional boxing. You say you were anxious about the boy, but it was none of your business, was it?”

“The kid is only eighteen, and I’m sure he’s being exploited, but I have a more personal reason for wanting to catch up with this lot—at least, with Maverick and Gracechurchstreet. How would you like it, Inspector, if, after you’d done months of research and had written a book, some unscrupulous operators swiped the results of your labours and bowdlerized them into a rotten play?”

“I must request you not to interrogate me, sir. It is you who are being questioned. What’s more, I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“If only you’d tell me what *you’re* talking about, I might be able to be of some help. I might be far more willing to answer your questions, too. May I ask whether you’re trying to get me to incriminate myself in some way? If so, I can assure you I’ve done nothing wrong.”

“Now, now, sir, let us not lose our sense of proportion. You are at liberty to refuse to answer my questions if you wish.”

“That wouldn’t be very sensible of me, would it? By the way, Inspector, you’re not a Yorkshireman, are you?”

“No, sir. New Scotland Yard C.I.D. I am working closely, however, with Yorkshire colleagues and with the Dorset police.”

“Then it’s murder you’re talking about!”

“You must not jump to conclusions, sir. However, you have answered my questions frankly, even if not very willingly, so I can tell you this much: we have traced the parties under advisement as far as Leeds, but there all trace of them seems to vanish.”

“Yes, Dame Beatrice’s information was that they’d gone to Leeds. Why do they have to be traced?”

“Because on Sunday, February twenty-eight, a motorist picking his way among the stone quarries on the heath adjacent to the village of Heathcote Fitzprior in Dorset . . .”

“A *motorist* among the stone quarries?”

“He had left his car at the side of the road and retired at a distance from it in search of some natural cover for the usual natural purpose, sir.”

“Oh, sorry! Yes, of course.”

“At the foot of one of the quarries he saw a dead body. It has since been identified as that of Reuben Gorinsky.”

“His body? Good Lord! But that must mean that he did not come up here to Yorkshire with the others.”

“Exactly, sir. Now perhaps you can see why we are interested in your advertisement.”

“Well, at least it proves I didn’t know he was dead.”

“Or that you did, sir, and were trying to lay a smoke screen.” Without giving Toby time to do more than gasp at this blow to the solar plexus, the inspector went on: “Further to the discovery of the body, and the necessary adjournment of the inquest, came the matter of your advertisement. When they saw how things were going, the Dorset County Police asked for the inquest to be adjourned, as there was conflicting medical opinion as to the way the death had been caused. In pursuing their enquiries they also obtained outside evidence, which had not been called at the inquest, to the effect that Gorinsky was a most unlikely person to have gone out alone to wander among stone quarries, but that, *if* such a notion had occurred to him, he would have taken his car as far as the heath. The village is two and a half miles from the *Swan Revived*, where he was last seen by the landlord on the night before the party left for London, and from the village it is another three miles to the quarry where the motorist spotted the body.”

“You don’t have to go right into the village to get to the quarries,” said Toby. “I mean, Heathcote Fitzprior lies off the main road. You can by-pass

it all right, and go on to Affpuddle and Bere Regis and on to Dorchester one way, or to Wimborne Minster the other."

"Quite so, sir. No car was found at the stone-quarries, but a car was seen in the village of Heathcote Fitzprior that morning and its number taken by a Mrs. Spreadapple who lives opposite the churchyard there. She keeps a tally of all cars which park on her grass verge and is continually pestering the rural district council to abate a nuisance, which she claims the aforesaid parking to be."

"Oh, well, as to that, people who come to visit the grave of the poet Heathcote must find somewhere to park, I suppose. That's what they come for, of course—to visit the grave."

"I wouldn't know, sir, about that. It is outside the scope of this enquiry. The point at issue is this—and this is why *we* have been called in—a car was found abandoned in the forecourt of the town hall of a London suburb, and it turns out to be the one whose number was taken by Mrs. Spreadapple in the village of Heathcote Fitzprior. One of the police officers deputed to tow it away—they thought it had been dumped—realized that the number was one which had been circulated. By that time, you see, we were beginning to doubt whether Accidental Death would have been the right verdict on Gorinsky, and as the car turns out to have been his, we are treating his death as a possible case of murder."

"And how do you know that it was Gorinsky's car?" asked Toby feebly.

"The landlord of the *Swan Revived* recognized the number after we had asked witnesses to come forward—anybody who could give information about persons seen in the neighbourhood of the stone quarries round about what the doctors thought was the time of death. It appears that Mrs. Spreadapple was tired of appealing to the council about cars being parked on the verge outside her cottage, so when this one appeared she took the number of it and went to the police. Later, of course, they were on the alert, took a chance, sent in a report and we circulated the number to all stations. This London constable recognized it as the number of a car they had towed away from the town hall, and it looked to us as though there might be something worthy of investigation. We found it interesting that a car seen in Heathcote Fitzprior should be found abandoned in London, especially considering that the owner's body had been found in a Dorset quarry."

“Then, I suppose, you traced Gorinsky’s party to Leeds. Very thorough, the police,” said Toby. “Wonderful organization.”

“Quite right, sir. We traced the party and made a very unhelpful discovery.”

“What was that, then?” Toby had forgotten his resentment and was now interested and alert.

“The car found in London had never been to Leeds, sir. On the other hand, Gorinsky *had*.”

“But I thought you said—I mean, if your dates are right, wasn’t Gorinsky . . . ?”

“Dead before the party went to London and on to Leeds? According to the medical evidence, he must have been. The doctors disagreed about the cause but not about the time of death. Our theory—it doesn’t matter telling you this, because it will be in all the evening papers and in tomorrow’s dailies—is that Gorinsky never left the neighbourhood of Heathcote Fitzprior at all, and that somebody else signed in for him at the Leeds hotel.”

“The party put up at an hotel, then? Don’t the management know how many people arrived?”

“They know how many took rooms, but not how many were actually in the party. The boy and the man who acted as his sparring-partner did not book in at the hotel. The names in the register are those of Gorinsky, room twenty-seven, Gracechurchstreet, room thirty-three, and Maverick, room forty, but the three appear to have been accompanied by others who helped the hotel porter with a considerable amount of luggage which was distributed among the three bedrooms and which included a quantity of rope and four stout metal poles.”

“How many others were there?”

“Two, the hall-porter thinks, which is what one would expect if the boy—his name is Holley—is included, but the descriptions we’ve been given are not much to go on.”

“Did they arrive by car?”

“Oh, yes, they asked for a lock-up at the hotel.”

“Did they all come in just the one car?”

“So far as we know. Why, sir, what makes you ask?”

“Oh, well, so far as I know, they had two cars, but if the car that Mrs. Spreadapple complained about was Gorinsky’s, they couldn’t all have come

in one car, unless it was a hired one."

"What causes you to say that, sir?"

"Because the only other car which belonged to their outfit was a battered little two-seater owned by Maverick. Did Mrs, Spreadapple describe the driver of the car she complained about?"

"She had plenty to say, but gave no description that would be of any help to us. We might *infer* that the driver was Gorinsky, but that is as far as we could reasonably go and, as the car seems to have been driven away after he died, the inference is that he was not alone in the car."

"And the car turned up again, abandoned in a London suburb? Somebody must have felt pretty desperate to leave an expensive 1968 Cosmo-Carrick to be towed away by the police!"

"A *what*, sir? Oh, dear me, not a Cosmo-Carrick. This was a battered little bus bought second-hand, I should say, and a long time ago, at that. It was a Prendergast Minor, 1954."

"But that's Maverick's car!" cried Toby. "Are you *sure* the dead man is Gorinsky? It doesn't sound likely to me! He wouldn't have been seen in a little tin contraption like that! There must be some mistake."

"The body has been identified by the landlord of the *Swan Revived*, that's all I know, sir."

"What's the number of this little car that got towed away?" The inspector quoted it.

"But *that's* the number of the Cosmo-Carrick!" cried Toby. "And if Gorinsky's dead, what has happened to the girl?"

CHAPTER SIX

The Hunt Is Up

". . . in the hopes of meeting something which might supercede conjecture."

William Cunnington—archaeologist, writing in 1803

"The number of the Cosmo-Carrick?" said the inspector, ignoring Toby's question. "Surely, sir, you are mistaken."

"I'm not," said Toby flatly. "What's more, I'll give you the number of the Prendergast Minor." He gave it. The inspector stared hard at him; then he said.

"If you're right, sir, then somebody changed over the number plates and our hunch that there's been murder done, and that Gorinsky's death was no accident, seems to have been about right, so our next job is to track down the parties concerned."

"They've left Leeds, I think you said. I heard they had joined this travelling fair, but that's the latest information I have."

"Just so, sir. If any further pointers come your way, I trust you'll let us know. You know our London number, I'm sure. I came here, sir, I might tell you, under the impression that you might be the person who signed the hotel register in Gorinsky's name."

"Good heavens, Inspector! I assure you I've been nowhere near Leeds! It's that wretched advertisement, I suppose. I wish I'd never thought of it!"

"Not to distress yourself unduly, sir. All the same, I would like to be assured of your co-operation."

"Oh, yes, but I doubt whether I'll have anything to tell you."

"Sir Ferdinand Lestrange and his contacts?"

"Oh, I see. Well, of course I'll do what I can. I want to find out where the boy is, so that's my incentive, apart from finding out what Gracechurchstreet is doing about that play."

"Your duty is to help the police, sir."

"The police be damned!" said Toby loudly, but not until he had closed the door behind the inspector and the sergeant.

“What was all that in aid of?” asked his friend. Toby told him, and then added,

“I’m for Leeds. That’s my starting-point. Oh, damn! I ought to have asked the inspector for the name of that hotel.”

“Will it wait until after lunch?”

“Oh, yes, but I may not get back here. If I can get a lead I’ll follow it up. Which is the best way to Leeds from here?”

“I should do Pateley Bridge and Harrogate, I think. Look here, I’ll come with you, if you like, but, honestly, don’t you think it would be better to leave the whole thing to the police? I mean, apart from the fact that they’ve got their eye on you, they must have far better facilities for tracking people down than you have.”

“I’m concerned with Dave. Besides, I know him by sight, and the police don’t.”

“Do you think he’s still with the others?”

“Not if one of them is Gorinsky’s murderer. I should think, now the report of the death is in all the papers, the first thing the gang would do is to split up and ditch the kid. What I’d like to be certain about is that the dead man *is* Gorinsky.”

“Well, he’s been identified, hasn’t he?”

“Yes, by Smetton, the chap who keeps the *Swan Revived*.”

“Well, then?”

“It’s the car that bothers me. Gorinsky would never have been driving that ghastly little bone-shaker of Maverick’s.”

“There must have been two people in the car when this Heathcote Fitzprior woman saw it.”

“She doesn’t seem to have said so. All the same, that might make another line of enquiry, but that’s for the police, and they’re on to it. I don’t give a button who killed Gorinsky, or why. He was a pretty nasty bit of work, anyway. I’ll be quite content to pick up Dave. I only hope he’s all right.”

“How do you mean—all right?”

“He might be a dangerous witness against whoever did the killing. I mean, he’d know that Gorinsky didn’t come to Yorkshire with the rest of the party, and I assume he can read well enough to absorb the newspaper reports.”

They set out immediately after lunch, and toured the Leeds hotels. Toby did not mention the names of Gorinsky, Maverick, and Gracechurchstreet for obvious reasons, but contented himself by giving a description of Dave and Harry. Chris, he thought, was most likely to have been the third man to have booked in, since Gorinsky himself could never have reached Leeds and yet three men, according to the police, had stayed at least one night, but probably only one, in hotel rooms. The murder, if murder it was, must have been the result of a conspiracy, unless, of course, the dead man was not Gorinsky, but that would make it appear as though Smetton was a party to the plot, and Toby found that difficult to imagine.

At the third hotel on his list he obtained news. A man, accompanied by a boy of about eighteen, had called round, asking for a Mr. Maverick, but Mr. Maverick and his friends had left on the previous day, having booked in for one night only. Further enquiry produced the information that the receptionist remembered the boy because he was so very good-looking and the man because he was so very uncouth. Oh, no, not *rude*, just, well, he seemed more like someone like Alf Garnett. Oh, no, he didn't use *language*, but he talked like him otherwise, and he and the boy seemed very put-out when they heard that Mr. Maverick and the other two gentlemen had left.

Toby booked a room for the night, and continued the questioning. Had she seen the couple before? Happen she had. She believed they had helped upstairs with the gear. The luggage? Well, that, too—seven suitcases—but there was what she called gear as well, thick rope, lots of it, and poles and boxing gloves, and a punching ball such as you might have at a fair.

A fair? Was there a fair in the neighbourhood? Not so far as she knew. That would be for Easter Monday, like, wouldn't it? Could she describe the men who had been helped with the gear? Well, there was one of them, thinnish, with big teeth, and talked what she would call sort of Jewish. What she meant, he could pronounce without lisping, but he sounded and looked, well, sort of Jewish, or, come to think of it, he could have been American, and he added up the bill and worked out the ten per cent as though he thought he was being cheated. Yes, she had met lots of Jewish gentlemen, most being commercials; they got a rare lot of commercials in a big place like Leeds, and a good many of them were Jewish, so she did not think she could be mistaken, and then there was the name, wasn't there? He had signed the register in the name of Gorinsky.

Did his companions address him by name? Not that she had heard. They had stood by the swing doors while he totted up the bill and settled it, and then they had all gone out together. Taking their luggage and all the gear? Oh, yes, it had taken the three of them and the hall porter to get it all down. Could Toby have a word with the porter? Well, he wasn't on duty again until six. Were they—with a very suspicious stare—the police? Toby reassured her and invented, on the spur of the moment, a story that he was Gorinsky's brother-in-law and had a message for him from his wife, Toby's sister, and added that he and his friend would come back at six, as the porter might have gathered, when he was helping to stow the baggage in the car, where the party had intended to go on leaving the hotel.

"Well," said the girl, "haven't you read the papers? Sorry to say it, but you won't find your brother-in-law, will you?"

"Keep this dark," said Toby impressively. "I don't believe it is my brother-in-law who's been killed. That's why my sister is so anxious to trace him. We think a mistake has been made."

The girl thought it was all very queer. Toby agreed. She added that they had had the police, and that it wasn't very nice for a respectable hotel, but that there had been nothing in the papers so far, thank goodness, to connect the hotel with the death. She supposed the death was an accident, wasn't it? Toby said that he thought it must have been, but that the circumstances were peculiar, as everybody thought Gorinsky had been in Yorkshire at the time and the hotel register proved it. If a mistake had been made, and the dead man was not his brother-in-law, then Gorinsky must be traced and the matter put right. He left his suitcase for the porter to take up when he came on duty, and took his friend off to the art gallery to pass the rest of the afternoon until six, when the friend returned to Hawes and Toby went back to the hotel.

The porter could add nothing to the information which had been supplied at the reception desk. He had heped the gentlemen out with their luggage, their car being a big one, but he had not noticed the make, his tip had been very small considering the help he had given, the gear he had handled had suggested the fittings of a boxing ring—his son boxed for a boys' club—and there was really nothing else he could remember. No, there had been no woman with the party, so far as he knew. Toby tipped him generously, and, visited by an idea, went up to the desk and asked whether he might look at the hotel register again. He had remembered the note

Gorinsky had sent him, and, as he had not destroyed it, he thought he might recognize the signature if he saw it again. As he was a hotel guest the girl made no objection to allowing him to turn back the pages. The signature was as he remembered it. The other names under the same date were those of Maverick and, in an unlettered hand, Gracechurchstreet, written with slight gaps between each syllable as though the writer had not been too certain of the spelling. No woman had booked in with the party, the girl at the desk informed him again.

Unsure of his next move, Toby had dinner, read one or two of the extremely dull periodicals which were laid out on a table in the lounge, and went to his room. There he unpacked the things he had brought with him, one of which was a notebook. In it he wrote out what he had gleaned from the inspector. Added to his own knowledge, what it amounted to was this: the dead man, whoever he was, was not Gorinsky; whoever had switched the car number plates was either the murderer or was in collusion with the murderer; if the unlettered hand which had signed the hotel register was not that of Gracechurchstreet, then the strong probability was that the body found in the stone quarry was that of the American impresario, and had been incorrectly identified by the landlord Smetton.

"But, if so," wrote Toby, painstakingly, "why has Smetton, who was well acquainted with both Gorinsky and Gracechurchstreet, identified the dead body as that of Dave's manager?"

He went to bed with his chief problem unresolved. He had not the faintest idea of how to find any way of getting on the track of Dave Holley. It was something, at any rate, to be able to put surnames to the boy and to Biddle. One could hardly tour Yorkshire asking for news of Dave and Harry. On the other hand, as he had nowhere (except the hotel in which he was staying) to start from, the names did not seem to offer much help. The travelling fair had appeared to offer a pointer, but if Gorinsky (if it *was* Gorinsky) and the other two had gone off without Dave and Harry, it was more than likely that they had also given up the travelling fair, since there would be no point in putting on exhibitions of boxing without the boy.

It took him a long time to get to sleep, and his chaotic dreams did not help him with any useful suggestions. In the morning, as on the previous night, only two courses appeared open to him. He could tour Yorkshire blindly, hoping that his enquiries would produce some result, or he could return to Heathcote Fitzprior and try to find out what had caused Smetton to

identify the body as that of Gorinsky when the signature in the hotel register in Leeds indicated clearly that Gorinsky was still alive and that somebody —almost certainly Scouse—had signed in the name of the dead man, Gracechurchstreet.

Of the two ideas, the second was by far the simpler to carry out, and might also produce information as to what had been the plans of the gang when they reached Yorkshire. Toby thought about this while he was having breakfast, and perceived the flaw in his reasoning. The party had gone to London when they had left the *Swan Revived*, and were unlikely to have told Smetton any more than this. More hopeful, in his opinion, was the inference that, with the information which he had been able to give the police with reference to the switched number plates, they themselves, with their country-wide contacts, would be more than likely to track down the suspects quickly and so, in a sense, do his work for him.

Toby finished his breakfast and went into the lounge to finish reading his morning paper and smoke his after-breakfast cigarette. The porter came up to him to tell him he was wanted on the telephone. He stubbed out his cigarette and followed the porter to the kiosk in the entrance hall.

"Sparowe here," he said.

"Aysbury speaking. I've got a visitor who says he's come in answer to that ad you sent to the papers. Says his name's Holley."

"Good! Keep him with you, Wally, and I'll come over at once. By the way, is he alone?"

"So far as I know."

"Right. Good-bye." Toby, once more the man of action, lost no time in paying his bill, bringing down his suitcase, and getting his car from the lock-up in the hotel yard. By half past eleven he was back at his friend's cottage. Dave, looking troubled but beautiful, was sitting opposite Aysbury in the living-room. They gave the impression of a captive and his gaoler, except that each was holding a pewter tankard containing beer.

"Hullo, Dave! Tearing up your diet sheet?" asked Toby. "Got another pint on you, Wally, by any chance?"

"Hullo, Tobe," said Dave. "Nice to see you." There was a certain bravado in his tone which surprised Toby. The boy was nervous, he thought.

"Hoped you'd come along," he said cheerfully. "How have you been making out?"

"Like wot you'd expect."

“Did your fight at the Ironbridge Baths come off all right?” He wondered what Dave would find to say about this. He half-expected some blasphemous comment and was surprised when the boy said calmly,

“Never went vere.”

“Really? How come?”

“Dunno. We come up ’ere instead.”

“I heard there was a scheme for exhibition bouts.”

“Was vere? Who told you?”

“But I suppose all those plans have fallen through. You must have read the papers or you wouldn’t have seen my advertisement. Won’t you tell me what happened? The dead man isn’t Gorinsky, is he? Why was he wrongly identified?”

The boy stared at him.

“Course ’e’s Gorinsky,” he said. “Oo else?”

“But Gorinsky signed in at the Leeds hotel, and this man—it must be Gracechurchstreet—was dead before any of you went to Yorkshire.”

“You’re talkin’ out the back of your neck, Tobe. Gorinsky never come to Yorkshire wiv us. Never went to Lunnon, neever. ’Course, it weren’t till I seen the papers as I fahnd aht ’e was butter an’ bread. Vey told me ’e was in ’orspital.”

“I think you’d better tell me all about it. There’s something here I don’t understand at all.”

“Ain’t got time, Tobe. Wot I come for was to see if you’d stand my friend, like.”

“Well, of course I will. Do you want some money? I can spring you a fiver to get you home to London, but that’s about my limit at the moment.”

“I wants you to get me away from ’ere and ’ide me.”

“Good Lord, Dave! You don’t mean…?”

“No, I never done it, Tobe. I swear I never. But I’ll get lumbered wiv it all right. I dunno which on ’em done it, but it wasn’t me.”

“Well, then, you’ve nothing to worry about.”

“I ’it ’im, Tobe. Laid ’im out cold, I did. Vey took me away, and I never see ’im again, but I never done ’im, Tobe. I swear I never! And, if I did, I never meant to, s’welp me!”

“But there’s no point in trying to hide, Dave. You can’t hide from the police if they want to question you. You’d be no safer with me than anywhere else.”

“I fought you’d stick by me.”

“So I will, but not to the extent of helping you to hide from the police. If you’ve done nothing wrong, the best thing is to answer their questions. They can’t convict an innocent man.”

“And ’ow innercent d’you fink I’ll seem when vem uvvers tells the tale? *One* on ’em done it, and I reckon the uvvers won’t grass. Vey’ll stick it on me ’cos I ’it ’im, see? Vey won’t stick veir stinkin’ necks aht when vey can use mine. Why should vey?”

“Look, Dave, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll take you to my place at Heathcote Fitzprior and you’re welcome to stay there as long as you like. But if the police come, well, they come, and you’ll have to face them. Don’t you see that to try to hide from them is tantamount to a confession of guilt? Can’t you understand that?”

“Toby’s right, you know, Dave,” said Aysbury quietly. “You go back with him to Dorset. I’ll bet the police won’t make any mistake about an arrest. You’ll be all right, so don’t worry.”

“Sez you!” growled the lad bitterly. “All right, ven, Tobe. I’ll go along wiv what you say, but I fought you was my friend. I fought you got sympafy, but I see you never. And you did ought to ’ave, ’cos it was on account of you I ’it ’im. Said some bleedin’ dirt abaht you, ’e did, so I up and ’it ’im, and dahn ’e went, and laid there, so you gotter stick by me, see?”

“Now,” said Toby, hours later, after he had stoked the fire in the waiting-room which he had converted into his study at Heathcote Fitzprior, “let’s have the whole story. And, for God’s sake, stop sulking! Anybody would think I’d done you down for the fun of it! Perk up, man, and let’s put our wits to work. Go back to the morning your outfit left the *Swan Revived*. I went for a drive to kill time until the pub opened, and, when I got back, you’d all gone.”

“Yer, vat’s right, Tobe. Us wented. All of a sudden, too.”

“How was that?”

“I dunno.”

“I mean, why did you leave so suddenly? Something must have happened, surely? You were booked in at the pub for another fortnight, or so Smetton told me.”

“Maybe we was. I wouldn’t know. It was after I went and plastered Gorinsky, see?”

“Yes. You knocked him out, did you?”

“Ah. I fought ’e was insultin’ of you, see? And nobody don’t insult a mate of mine wivaht I does somefink abaht it.”

“But, my dear chap, his insults couldn’t hurt me!”

“No, but vey ’urted *me*, see? So I ups and dots ’im one, steppin’ forward on the punch. I ’as it measured, see, and ’e cops it a beauty. I don’t know when I ’it anybody sweeter. So ’e folds right up, see, and Chris —‘member Chris?—’e’s me trainer—’e tries to fetch me a clip, and ’Arry —’member ’Arry?—’e’s me sparrin’ partner, poor old sod!—’e takes the swing on ‘is arm and tells Chris to leave me be. Ven Mr. Gracechurchstreet, ’e starts dancin’ abaht and says not to spile me fice ’cos me fice is ’is fortune, and Mr. Maverick, ’e kneels dahn by Gorinsky and sponges ’is kisser and all vat, and the next fing I knows, after ’Arry and vat louse Chris bundles me aht of it, aht of it, we’re all makin tracks for Lunnon. Course, I never knoo Gorinsky was cold pork till I read abaht it in the pipers. Vey said vey took ’im to ’orspital.”

“What happened after you knocked him out and the others wouldn’t let Chris go for you?”

“I told you. ’E’s layin’ vere, so ’Arry and vem, vey bundles me up to me room, what’s up in the rafters, and Mr. Gracechurchstreet, ’e says to set dahn quiet on me bed and cool orf. ‘You might ’ ave killed Gorinsky,’ ’e says. ‘You warnt to watch yerself,’ ’e says, ‘else you might find yerself in Queer Street,’ ’e says, ‘flyin’ orf the andle like vat, you young fool,’ ’e says. ‘Don’t you know no better’n to quarrel wiv your brenbutter, not to say your piece o’ cake?’ ’e says. So I says I don’t stand by and ’ear my pals insulted, and ’e leaves me be, and I ’ears ’im lock the door on the ahtside, but it don’t bovver me none, ’cos I finks it’s so’s Chris and Gorinsky can’t come in and do me, see?”

“What happened after that?—and for Pete’s sake don’t tell me you don’t know!”

“’Course I knows, Tobe. Next fing is Mr. Maverick undoes the door and tells me to pack me fings ’cos we’re orf to Lunnon. So I packs me fings . . .”

“Didn’t you wonder what it was all in aid of?”

“No, I never, ’cos I fought as ’ow the landlord was chuckin’ of us aht on account I busted Gorinsky, see? So vey unlocks the door and I comes aht and vey bundles me in the car and chucks me luggage in the boot, and we’re orf. So I says, ‘Where’s Gorinsky? Is ’e orl right?’ And Mr. Maverick says, ‘Yus, ’e’s orl right, no fanks to you, you young scallywag, but ’e’s bin took orf to ‘orspital be ambulance ’cos the doc finks ’e might ’ave a blood-clot on account of you knockin’ of ’im abaht,’ ’e says. Well, I don’t mind tellin’ yer, Tobe, vat put the wind up me proper, ’cos a bloke dahn our road when I was a nipper got ’ad up for manslaughter for crahnin’ ’is missus and givin’ ’er a blood-clot, see? So I makes meself as small as I knows ’ow, and orf us goes to Lunnon.”

“Were you all in the car except for Gorinsky?”

“Sure, Tobe. All on us. All five, wiv free on us squashed on the back seat.”

“Who was driving?”

“Mr. Maverick, wiv Mr. Gracechurchstreet be the side of ’im.”

“Why wasn’t he in his *own* car with Gracechurchstreet? Didn’t they have a broken-down tin Liz? I seem to remember, when they called to see me, they came in a tatty old Prendergast Minor.”

“Vat’s right. I never fought abaht it till I read in the pipers as vey’d fahnd it.”

“Was Gorinsky’s girl in the car with you?”

“No. Never seed nuffink of ’er. I never. Vere was five of us, like I said.”

“I suppose she went—no, he couldn’t have been taken to hospital. You realize the police are treating Gorinsky’s death as a possible case of murder, don’t you, Dave?”

“Sure. What you fink I want you to ’ide me for? But, ’strewth, Tobe, I on’y ’it ’im the once. Vey carn’t call vat murder, can vey?”

“No, of course not. That’s why I say you mustn’t attempt to hide. What happened after you got to London?”

“We picks up wiv vis fair, see? Vey was on Yelton Common when we picks ’em up, and ven we all goes up to Yorkshire. Took us free days, it did. Well, we gets to Doncaster and the fair stops orf and we stops orf wiv it a coupla days and ven we leaves the fair—it were a one-’orse little bleeder wiv a big rahndabaht and a little rahndabaht and a coconut shy and an ’oopla and an Aunt Sally and some swing-boats and a stall wot sold bubble

gum and vat—and we comes up to Leeds, and the uvvers, vey gets me and ’Arry a room, but vey stops at the ’otel and says to come back in a coupla days, but vey ’ad wented wivaht us.”

“Did you do any boxing when you got to Doncaster?”

“Crikey, no! Me nerve’s gorn, see? I couldn’t do nuffink ’cept keep on finkin’ abaht Gorinsky in ’orspital and maybe croakin’ on me, and me bein’ ’ad up and vat, and I couldn’t a-made meself ’it a bundle of old clo’es, let alone wiv a man inside of ’em.”

“Yes, I can understand that. So, in Leeds, the others ditched you and Harry. What’s happened to him?”

“’E went yeller on me, Tobe. When we fahnd aht as the uvver lot ’ad gorn orf and left us, ’Arry scarpers, see? It was when ’e sent me orf for some fish and chips, and when I got back wiv ’em ’e was gorn.”

“But you’d seen my advertisement by then, so you went along to Hawes to find me. Much the most sensible thing you could have done.”

“You fink the p’lice is lookin’ for me, Tobe?”

“They’re looking for all of you, I expect—not for you alone. If they suspect Gorinsky was murdered, they’ll trace anybody who can give them any information, and that’s not only you. It’s Maverick and Gracechurchstreet and Harry and Chris as well, so put a good face on it and keep your chin up.”

“Dahn, you mean,” said the boxer. “O.K., Tobe. I read you.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

In and Out the Windows

"In and out the windows, in and out the windows,
In and out the windows, as you have gone before."

Anon.—*Children's Singing Game*

"Just one more thing, Dave," said Toby, after a long silence. "How long were you locked in your room before they let you out and took you up to London?"

"I dunno."

"Oh, come, now! *Think*! You must have some idea."

"What do it matter?"

"It matters enormously, you dope! While you were safely out of the way, one or more of them may have murdered Gorinsky and taken his body to that stone-quarry where it was found. Bend the brain, man! Try to think! Didn't you have a wrist-watch?"

"It never went after I busted Gorinsky. I 'it 'im wiv me left, see, like what you said, and the watch, well, it wasn't no good no more."

Toby racked his own brain. He had left his railway station home (on what was probably the day of Gorinsky's death) at about a quarter past ten and had returned (to find the pub party gone) at roughly midday. It seemed that at some time during that hour and three-quarters, Gorinsky had been murdered and his body dumped three miles on the further side of Heathcote Fitzprior.

"Dave," he said, "did you see me go off in my car that morning?"

"Sure, Tobe, I seen you. I was easin' orf me skippin' and I 'appened to look aht the winder and I says, not to nobody in partic'lar, as vere you goes, and vat's where Gorinsky steps outer line and says it's a pity your sort don't go to quod no more, so I ups and 'its 'im. I don't reckon it didn't travel no more nor six inches, 'cos I steps in wiv it, see, like what you showed me, 'cos I feints first of all at 'is basket and ven, as 'is 'ead come forward, I connects, steppin' *wiv* it, and dahn 'e wented cold! But I couldn't a-killed 'im, Tobe, could I? Vey took 'im orf to 'orspital, didn't vey, and some sod done 'im after vat. It wasn't me, Tobe, honest! It couldn't a-bin me!"

“I don’t think he went to hospital, Dave. Look, we’ve had a long day and it’s getting late. Let’s sleep on it, and in the morning I’ll go across to the pub and see what Smetton knows about all this.”

He was not at all sure of being made welcome by the landlord, but Smetton seemed very willing to talk about the events which had preceded the discovery of Gorinsky’s body. He greeted Toby warmly.

“Missed you, sir,” he said. “Have a nice holiday, did you?”

“Fair to middling. Not quite the best time of year. I hear you’ve had some excitement in these parts since I went.”

“I’ll say so! Mother’s been properly put out, with me having to identify the body, and all that.”

“So I understand. Gorinsky, wasn’t it? It seems a bit of a mystery. What was the verdict at the inquest?”

“What you might call an open verdict, sir, and the police are going to pursue their enquiries.” Toby knew this, but continued to probe.

“I take it they suspect foul play.”

“Not much else they *can* think, the body being found where it was.”

“I suppose, if that motorist hadn’t happened to come upon it by accident, it could have lain there for months.”

“Ah, if not for years, sir. It was found in some of the old workings, you see, where the quarrymen don’t go any more. Once they get to a certain depth it isn’t feasible to go any deeper because of the difficulty for quarriers in a small way—family units, they are, quite often—to bring out the blocks of limestone, so, after a bit, the different workings get abandoned, and it was in one of these he was found.”

“I don’t see why the police necessarily suspect murder. Couldn’t he have tumbled into the quarry by accident?”

“If so, where did he leave his car?—and who took Mr. Maverick’s car to London and abandoned it there? And why haven’t Mr. Maverick and the others come forward to tell the police what they know?”

“I wish you’d tell me what *you* know. I’ve a special reason for gathering all the information I can. You see, if the verdict is that Gorinsky was murdered, I understand that the young boxer, Dave Holley, may be implicated. Is it true that he had a toss-up with Gorinsky and knocked him down?”

“I never saw anything of that.”

“But you knew about it.”

“It was done up in the ballroom where they put their portable boxing-ring and other of their gear.”

“So I understand. What led to the row?”

“Search me, *I* don’t know. The young fellow flew off the handle about something or other, but I never heard the rights and wrongs. Of course, he was a bit cheesed off with the whole set-up, the boxer was. They wouldn’t let him have beer and, although his food was of the very best (what he had of it), they rationed him pretty strictly and worked him very hard to try to get his weight down, like I told you.”

“Did you know the reason for that?”

“I did hear something about a film.”

“I found out, you know, that they’d told him a lot of lies about getting him a fight in London. I went to find out about it, because I was suspicious when Gorinsky stopped the boy from training with me and refused to let me have a ticket for the fight. I thought, from the beginning, that they were a phoney lot of characters, and when I went to London and found that the baths’ hall, where Dave had been told the fight would be held, was never used for such a purpose, I trailed them to Yorkshire, where I was told they’d gone, but I lost track of them in Leeds.”

“Well, I should say it’s only a matter of time before the police catch up with them, sir.”

“Well, I don’t know what you think about it, Smetton, but, unless they’ve got guilty knowledge of Gorinsky’s death, I should have thought, as I suppose you do, that they’d have contacted the police by now and provided evidence of what happened.”

“You and me would have done so, sir, being British subjects and, no doubt, knowing our rights, such as they are, but when you come to consider, well, Gracechurchstreet is an American, Maverick comes from the Irish Republic, and as for Scouse and Biddle, well, to put it polite, they’re a couple of very ignorant men of the kind not to like the idea of getting tangled up with the police. Oh, not criminal types, sir—nothing of that. Just simple. The sort that can’t stand up for themselves short of swearing and using their fists. Innocent, but kind of ivory-skulled, if you see what I mean.”

“I wonder *why* Gorinsky was killed?” said Toby. “Incidentally, I wonder why I haven’t ordered a drink? My usual, please.”

The landlord turned towards the back of the bar and had just picked up a glass tankard when the sound of a car, indicating possible custom, caused him to swing round. The car, however, roared away into the distance.

"Same make as mine," said Toby, who had stepped across to the window just in time to see the back of the vehicle flash round a bend in the road. He perched himself on a stool and, a couple of men coming in, he withdrew into his own thoughts, which were neither clear nor comforting. He wondered whether there was any more information to be obtained from the landlord, supposing there was anything more that he knew. One set-up, Toby decided, was a trifle suspicious. On the departure of the gang for London, Smetton had mentioned nothing to him about Gorinsky's not being in the car, and yet he must have known that the manager could not have been with the rest of the party when they left the inn. The probability was that the small, battered mini-car belonging to Maverick had been driven off to Heathcote Fitzprior before the big car left for London. The landlord might also know who had gone with Gorinsky to Heathcote Fitzprior that morning, and, if he did, he must also suspect that this man could be the murderer, although that might not be the case if Gorinsky had been killed at the *Swan Revived*, and not at the quarry.

Toby wondered how best he might return to the attack, and then, on second thoughts, whether it would be either wise or profitable to do so. If Smetton had guilty knowledge, it could only mean that he was either being terrorized by the gang or was in collusion with them. In either case, if he felt he was being driven into a corner, he might turn awkward, possibly even dangerous. Toby believed that he himself possessed the average amount of physical courage expected of a peaceable, law-abiding man, but the thought of being knocked on the head and his body tossed into one of the stone-quarries was anything but attractive.

More customers, motorists this time, came in. He finished his drink and went back to his railway station home. It was empty. Dave had gone. There was a sheet of paper on the table in the booking-office study with a cheap ball-point pen lying across it.

"Dear Tobe," the message ran, "I do not think I does me or you no good by staying here no longer, so I have took your car and wented. You will find it at Southampton where I shall try and get a ship. I am right sorry to do this to you, Tobe, as has been my friend, but it is better I do not cause you no more trouble. I would not like you to think as I have halt-inched

your car, so I am writing this letter and oblige yours Dave. *PS*. You might be a regular guy and not tell the police too soon as your car has been drove away, as I would like to get clear before they starts moseying around."

"Damn!" said Toby thoughtfully. "*Now* what do I do?" He felt somewhat helpless without the car. For one thing, there was very little in the house to eat. He had planned to drive into Morchester to do some shopping, but that, for the time being, seemed out of the question. Before the railway branch line had been allowed to fall into disuse he could have gone in by train, but that was no longer possible. The nearest station from which he could make the trip was seven miles away, which meant a fourteen-mile walk altogether, with a heavy load to carry on the return journey. Then he wondered whether the *Swan Revived* could give him a meal. It was a decided possibility and might also give him a chance to re-open the subject of Gorinsky's death without having this appear to be the object of a special journey. There was nothing but tinned food in his own larder and this was mostly soup and tinned meat. What he felt he wanted was a home-cooked lunch with two or three kinds of vegetables, followed by a substantial pudding and some cheese.

The thought of such a meal, plain and simple though it might be, made him feel ravenous. He closed the pantry door and went across the road to the inn. Mrs. Smetton was alone behind the bar, and to her (feeling that he was in luck) he made his request.

"Ah," she said, "of course you can have a bit of dinner. I'll put a cloth on a little table in the parlour, because you won't want to eat out here in the saloon, with the regulars coming in. I see you lent your car. Looked like that young boxer in it. I didn't know he was back. Stopping along of you, is he?"

"Oh, no. He just called in," said Toby hastily. "All the plans have been changed since Gorinsky's death."

"As well they might be. That was a dreadful thing, wasn't it? And Mr. Smetton having to be the one to identify him. That was a right nasty, unpleasant thing to have to do, wasn't it, now?"

"Yes, indeed, most unpleasant. What—er—what made the police think that Mr. Smetton knew him?" (This was a point which had not occurred to Toby before.)

"Funny about that," agreed Mrs. Smetton. "Seems that the man who found him had called in here for a drink a week or two back—a week or

two before he found him, I mean—and when the police asked if he knew him, he said no, he didn't, but he thought he'd seen him at the *Swan*, and, as he'd come into the bar from upstairs, he thought he might be a relation of ours and been stopping here, and anyway, if not, we'd probably know who he was."

"The chap must have had a pretty good memory for faces, if he remembered a chance encounter like that," commented Toby. "I'm dashed if *I'd* remember a chap I'd seen casually in a bar, or, if I remembered his face, I doubt whether I'd have remembered where I'd seen him."

"That's what I said to Mr. Smetton," said the landlord's wife. "Got it off very pat, hasn't he?" I said. "You see, Mr. Sparowe, it's not very nice going and identifying folks that have been murdered. It gets you talked about."

"That hasn't actually been said yet, though, has it?—that Gorinsky was murdered, I mean."

"That wasn't a natural death, Mr. Sparowe. The only question in my mind is to wonder which of 'em did it. You heard about the fight upstairs, I suppose?"

"I heard that Gorinsky said something out of turn and that young Dave knocked him out."

"Shows nasty temper, like, doesn't it?"

"Granted, except that there was provocation. Haven't you ever been provoked?"

"Not to the extent of wanting to murder anybody. Mr. Sparowe."

"Good Lord, no, of course not! Neither did young Holley want to murder anybody! I meant, haven't you ever wanted to—well, I don't know what ladies do which would be the equivalent of socking a man on the jaw —"

"Well, as to that," said Mrs. Smetton, giggling, "I *have* been known to throw the butter-dish at Mr. Smetton. It didn't hit him, though," she added. "It only got smashed against the wall, and it was a wedding present, so that's where my bit of bad temper got *me*. 'That'll learn you,' Mr. Smetton said, when he'd done laughing, and, of course, it did. That was in our very early days. Still, it learnt him, too, none the less for that, because he's never *really* aggravated me since. Well, I'd better go and see about a bit of dinner for you. You come at the right time. It's nearly ready. I'll just spread a bit of a cloth."

Somewhat relieved at having shelved the subject of the punch-up, Toby enjoyed his dinner of roast pork, roast potatoes, and cabbage, paid for it and for the ale he drank with it, was sincere in his thanks, and, greatly sustained, was about to go back to the railway station and telephone a private hire firm in Morchester for the loan of a car, when Smetton came into the room with a tray and began to clear the table. This struck Toby as an unusual proceeding considering that there were two women in the house, but the reason for it was soon made apparent. Smetton wanted a private conversation.

"I think, Mr. Sparowe," he said, "as you and me had better understand each other before anything goes any farther."

"Yes, I think that's not a bad idea," said Toby. "I suppose you know that young Dave has hopped it in my car."

"Well, mother says she kind of recognized him."

"Yes. However, it's all right. He left me a note. The police have been here, of course?"

"All along of a belly-aching old Martha in Heathcote Fitzprior reporting a car on her bit of grass. It isn't her grass, either, being the roadside verge. However, she gave the number, and then, of course, this Mr. Cann reported finding Gorinsky's body and gave the name of my house, so then nothing wouldn't do but I should go along and identify."

"At the mortuary, I suppose?"

"That's right. Soon as the police had done with photographs and all else they do when there's an unexpected death, they took the poor fellow to Morchester and laid him out and come here and fetched me along to look at him."

"Any difficulty in recognizing him?"

"Not the very least, sir. His face wasn't touched except for a big bruise which I take it he got when young Dave hit him . . ."

"So you did know that Dave hit him? You were a bit cagey about it when you spoke to me last time, weren't you?"

"Well, you know how it is, sir. Never trouble trouble, as they say, but mother and I talked it over, and she thought that you, being an educated gentleman, would be able to advise me."

"But why do you need advice?"

"Well, sir, so far as the inquest is concerned—you know, of course, that it's been adjourned—I'm not in any difficulty. All I have to speak to is

the identity, as I've already done. But if they bring it in murder, sir, it will have to go to the magistrates and it'll be a committal—bound to be—and that means the magistrates will have found there's a case to answer, and on that I reckon I'm bound to be questioned."

"But you don't think he was killed here in your pub, do you?"

"There's the young chap knocking him down, sir. I said his face was recognizable, but the chap at the mortuary told me—we had a drink together in Morchester when he come off duty, after the police had gone—that the back of his head was a dreadful sight."

"I still think he may have smashed himself up falling into the quarry, you know."

"Doctor at the inquest seemed to think he'd have likely broken an arm or leg, if that was it. He never claimed exactly that Gorinsky had been knocked on the head deliberately, but you could tell what he thought. After all, them quarries aren't *that* deep!"

"Well, if the case *does* go before the beaks, I don't see that you need any advice from me, or from anybody else. You must just answer any questions as straightforwardly as you can, and leave it at that. Of course the police will round up Gorinsky's party, and it will be much worse for them than for you, because, on present showing, if he was killed deliberately, then one or more of them must know something about it, and the fact that they all appear to be more or less on the run looks highly suspicious, doesn't it? Apart from the row young Dave had with Gorinsky, do you know of any quarrels or disagreements?"

"Not me. Always behaved themselves while they were here."

"Well, then, I don't see what you've got to worry about. You'll have to admit to hearing the row between Gorinsky and Dave, of course."

"Yes, but I wasn't in the room, you know. Another funny thing, I can't think what happened to the girl, sir."

"No, that part of it does seem a bit odd. You actually saw her, did you?"

"I'll swear to it, Mr. Sparowe."

"And you didn't see her with the rest of them when they left to go to London?"

"No, I'm certain she wasn't with them."

"You gave her your wife's cousin's room, I believe."

“That’s right. She had Daffy’s room, Daffy kipped in with the wife, and I had a shake-down on the parlour sofa.”

“I suppose the bed was slept in?—Miss Daffy’s bed, I mean.”

“Daffy would have said if it *hadn’t* been. She was fair tizzied at having to give it up to a stranger. But since you raise the point, sir, let’s have her in and ask her. I don’t like it, the way the young lady just seems to have disappeared.” He went to the door, opened it, and yelled for Daffy. She came, wiping her hands on her apron, a dough-faced spinster of uncertain years, but possessing small, intelligent grey eyes.

“Miss Daffy,” said Toby, “you remember, a week or two back, the day before Mr. Gorinsky’s party left for London, that you were asked to give up your room so that his young woman could be accommodated?”

“And why couldn’t they sleep together, like a decent married couple? —if they *were* married,” said Daffy belligerently.

“Oh, of course . . .” Toby turned to the landlord.

“Well, as to that,” said Smetton, “I did suggest it, not to turn Daffy out of her room and thinking the girl was his wife, but Gorinsky never agreed. Him and her were to have Daffy’s room, it being a double bed, and I was to have his little cubbyhole in the attic. But, when it come to the crunch, he must have changed his mind, because he swore at me when I repeated the arrangements, and said he’d got all his gear in the attic room, and wasn’t going to shift it, and wasn’t going to have anybody interfering with it. Very unpleasant he was.”

“All the same, you don’t know which room he actually occupied that night? I mean, it’s possible, if he *didn’t* sleep with the girl, that she sneaked away, and that’s why she didn’t go off to London with the rest of them. What about breakfast time?”

“She wasn’t down to breakfast, and neither was Mr. Gorinsky,” said Daffy. “I know that. Neither was they in my bedroom, because I went there with early tea, having swallowed my temper and thinking, if there was a young lady, she might like a cuppa before she got up, seeing they mostly do.”

“And neither of them was there?”

“Neither of them.”

“And *had* the bed been slept in?”

“Well, it was kind of rumpled, but that’s not to say it had been slept in —not by two people, anyway, I wouldn’t have said.”

"What you mean is that *neither* of them may have slept in it, do you, Miss Daffy?"

"Well, there you are," said Daffy. "I never thought nothing to it at the time, except to think it wasn't like Mr. Gorinsky's style to go for a walk before breakfast, but when he wasn't at breakfast neither, and Tommy—that's Mr. Smetton—asks me whether the young lady was coming down, and, of course, she never, and neither Dora—that's Mrs. Smetton—nor me had so much as set eyes on her at all, both of us being in bed when she arrived, well, that's when I began to wonder."

"Wonder what, Miss Daffy?"

"Oh, just wonder."

"But he did come back from Morchester with the girl and Scouse?" said Toby, turning to the landlord.

"Oh, yes, they come back all right. Round about midnight or a bit before, it would have been," said Smetton.

With plenty to think about, Toby went home and telephoned Morchester for the self-driven car. It arrived at half-past three and by half-past five he was in Southampton. The problem was to locate his own car, and the first place to look for it was at the docks, if Dave had intended to stow away on board ship.

Toby had taken a car several times on to the Channel ferry, and was acquainted with the position, near Number Seven Gate, of the port office of the Automobile Association. He drove along Town Quay, Platform Road, and Canute Road, therefore, and in at Number Five Gate. At the office he gave the number, make, and colour of his car and, to his immense surprise, upon the production of his driving licence and other identifying documents, he was given the car keys which Dave had left at the office, and was told in which car park he would find his property.

Dave, apparently, had explained that Toby had lent him the car and would sooner or later wish to pick it up. He had even given a tolerably recognizable description of Toby himself. There remained the question of getting the hired car back to its owners in Morchester, but the A.A., efficient and helpful as ever, could cope with that small problem and proceeded to do so. Toby regained possession of his own car and, still surprised, impressed, and rather touched by Dave's concern that his property should be restored to him with the minimum of inconvenience, drove thankfully homewards, stopping for a meal on the way.

He pondered, all that evening and again the next morning, on Dave's unnecessary and foolhardy flight. If, at the resumed inquest, the verdict was wilful murder, all of Gorinsky's associates would be wanted for questioning, and Dave's absence, supposing that he had been successful in getting aboard a ship, was bound to look extremely suspicious, particularly as his attack on Gorinsky was certain to be mentioned by the others. He wondered where they were, and to what extent they would attempt to pin the guilt on the defenceless boy. Then another idea struck him. From what he knew of Dave's mentality, it seemed surprising that he should have had the intelligence to hand in the car keys at the A.A. office, report the whereabouts of the car, and give a description, sufficiently clear to be recognizable, of the car's owner. Toby's suspicions crystallized. He thought he saw the mysterious hand of Gracechurchstreet behind all this legerdemain. That meant that Gracechurchstreet and Dave had never lost touch with one another. It might even mean that the gang had never really broken up and scattered.

Whether any of this was true, only time would show. There was nothing for it but to try to settle down to work again—a pained letter from his aunt which had arrived by the morning post at ten-thirty reminded him that she had not received his last week's article and that this week's was overdue—and wait with what patience he could for the next move by the police, for that they were "pursuing their enquiries" could not be in doubt in view of the adjourned inquest.

In spite of his desire to put the whole thing out of his mind until there was more to work on, Toby found, between his bouts of literary composition, that he was thinking about the purloining and the restitution of his car. If Gracechurchstreet was a party to Dave's flight, it might have seemed expedient to him that a neutral car (so to speak) had to be involved. The mini, so far as Toby knew, was still in the hands of the police, and Gorinsky's big car was red-hot if one of the gang was the murderer.

From this it seemed to follow that Dave, far from intending to stow away on board ship, had accompanied Gracechurchstreet as a legitimate, fee-paying passenger, and by this time the two of them, probably accompanied by Maverick, were halfway to America. The likely theory was that the impresario and his friend had quarrelled with Gorinsky over the boxing bouts. They wanted the boy whole and comely for their film. Gorinsky wanted some gate-money from the exhibition contests before the

young boxer was taken over to the States. Words could have become blows, Gorinsky could have been killed at the inn, his body hidden in the mini and taken to the stone-quarry, and the driver whom Mrs. Spreadapple had reported to the police could have been the murderer. This driver could then have been either Gracechurchstreet or Maverick.

This theory, though, required re-examination, for, if it was correct, then something had caused Scouse and Biddle to lie low instead of coming forward with information. There were three possible answers, the third of which (from what he knew of the two men) seemed the most likely. They might have been bribed, for Gracechurchstreet did not seem short of money if the wallet he had shown Toby contained a hundred pounds; or, of course, they might have been threatened (and men who had committed one murder were not likely to be squeamish about another one or two, since the grim result would be the same); or, being ignorant men brought up to regard the police as potential enemies, the two East Enders might simply have decided to opt out and keep their mouths shut rather than become involved with the law.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Further Proceedings

> ". . . but if he was fighting, then he was doing what was unlawful, and your verdict should be against him."
>
> Mr. Justice Lindley—*R. v. Knock*, 1877

"A letter from Toby Sparowe," said Laura, handing it over. "They're bringing the case of that man Gorinsky before the magistrates, as the police are taking proceedings against Dave Holley. I rather think I'd like to go. It seems a queer kind of business and there might be something interesting to hear. What do you say?"

Dame Beatrice read the letter, re-inserted it in its envelope and handed it back.

"As you please," she said. "The evidence may be interesting, as you say, and, so far as I can see, it can hardly be conclusive. A committal will inevitably follow."

"Yes, but who will the magistrates commit? That's what I want to find out. It seems to me, where that gang is concerned, that it's even money which of them did it, if, as the police seem to think, it was cold-blooded murder."

"The proceedings may establish a motive, and that might point to the guilt of one man, a couple in collusion, or even conspiracy on the part of them all."

"Not all of them, surely? From what Toby has told us, it looks as though young Dave and poor old Harry Biddle will be in the clear, at any rate, so that reduces the number of possibles."

"Why do you exclude those two, I wonder?"

"Well, Dave was locked in his room, and Harry was on guard outside the door, when the murder was committed."

"And whose word have we for that?"

"You mean the others will deny it?"

"Who can say? In any case, it will be immaterial if they cling to their story that Gorinsky drove off in Maverick's small car with the promise to meet them in Yelton, and that he was alone in the car when he left."

“But *you* think he was killed at the *Swan Revived*, don’t you? You think that, if they plead as you say, they’ll be telling lies? Of course, they’re out to incriminate the boy, but it seems to me that the landlord and his wife are the material witnesses. They *must* know more than they’ve said. They surely saw or heard *something*!”

“We shall see.”

The Old Court House in Morchester had been abandoned some years earlier in favour of a pretentious new building which formed the north side of a large square at the western end of the town. The square itself was used as a car park and was bounded on the west by an office block (also newly built), on the south by a Georgian town house and its garden wall, and on the east by a narrow street which petered out at one end in a row of old cottages and at the other formed a one-way outlet from the car park into the High street.

Except for the public gallery, which was well-filled, the big modern courtroom seemed curiously empty. There were five chairs for the justices on the dais at the far end of the room, but only two were occupied. Below them sat the magistrates’ clerk flanked by a couple of typists. The two press benches held a single representative who was there to report proceedings for the local paper and on the opposite side of the room was the inspector in charge of the case, representing the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, partnered by a uniformed warrant officer. To the inspector’s left was the square witness box. Another warrant officer would accompany the accused and a third was accommodated with a chair and small table below and to the right of the public gallery. At the solicitors’ table sat a solitary man who represented the police, but, before the warrant officer read out the number of the next case, a slim, dark young man slid into a vacant chair.

Laura caught Dame Beatrice’s eye.

“Did *you* brief Sebastian Lestrange?” she asked.

Dame Beatrice did not reply, and the accused was brought in. The magistrates’ clerk turned the leaves of the register.

“You are David John Holley?” Dave sullenly agreed.

“Holley, Your Worship,” said the inspector, “stands charged with causing the death of Reuben Gorinsky at the *Swan Revived* inn on the twenty-seventh of February this year.”

To the clerk's next question Dave sullenly entered a plea of Not Guilty and the prosecuting solicitor rose to address the Bench.

"May it please Your Worships, I appear for the prosecution. You will hear, in this case, of a quarrel, which is not in dispute, between the accused and the deceased during which the accused, David John Holley, attacked the deceased, Reuben Gorinsky, with sufficient force to render him unconscious. It is further not in dispute that the accused then kicked the unconscious man on the head. In consequence of this, David John Holley stands before you accused of manslaughter, from which a more serious charge, that of wilful murder, may derive. I suggest that there are no extenuating circumstances in this case. The accused is eighteen years of age and must have been aware of the probable consequences of his wilful act. I call Detective-Inspector Cullin."

"Call Detective-Inspector Cullin," said the usher.

The inspector took the stand and the oath.

"You are Detective-Inspector Cullin of the Morchester Police? Please tell the court the circumstances in which you arrested the accused, David John Holley, for the mans'aughter of Reuben Gorinsky on or about the twenty-seventh of February this year."

"On March third I was informed over the telephone of the discovery of a body in a quarry on Sandy Heath. I proceeded to the spot and verified the information and instructed the removal of the body to Morchester after I had examined the quarry and photographs of the body had been taken *in situ*. I called a doctor who examined the body *in situ* and subsequently more thoroughly at the Morchester mortuary. I learned . . ."

"Yes, Inspector, we will hear the medical evidence later," said the presiding magistrate.

"I further learnt from my informant that the landlord of the inn known as the *Swan Revived* was in a position to identify the remains, and that this he subsequently did."

"From your examination of the quarry, did you come to any conclusions?" asked the prosecuting counsel, whose name was Mapp.

"Not at the time, sir, no. I concluded only that deceased had met with an accident in falling into the quarry, and proceeded on that assumption until I learned from the landlord of the inn of a quarrel between deceased and the defendant which had taken place before witnesses on February twenty-seventh."

“What action did you take?”

“I tracked down, with the assistance of my colleagues in the Yorkshire police and at New Scotland Yard, the said witnesses, Your Worship, and also the accused, whom I discovered stowing away on a ship bound for the United States. I apprehended and questioned him, and as a result of his answers and the statements of witnesses, I charged him.”

The dark young man who was appearing for the defence rose to cross-examine.

“You say, Inspector, that you examined the quarry?”

“Very thoroughly, sir.”

“Were there traces of blood?”

“No, sir.”

“Any signs of a struggle, either in the quarry or on the edge of it?”

“No, sir.”

“So you have no evidence that the deceased was killed there?”

“No, sir. We think he was killed at the inn.”

“But you say that the first conclusion to which you came was that there had been an accident and the deceased had fallen into the quarry, thus occasioning his own death.”

“That was my first conclusion, yes, sir.”

“But, merely on the strength of hearing about a quarrel at the inn three or four days earlier, you jumped to the conclusion that the deceased had been assaulted there with sufficient violence to cause his death?”

“Ultimately, yes, sir.”

“At the inn? I repeat, *at the inn*?”

“Failing evidence that the assault had been carried out at the quarry, at the inn, yes, sir.”

“Have you examined the inn?”

“Certainly I have, sir.”

“Did you find traces of blood there?”

“No, sir. My contention is that the deceased was assaulted at the inn without actual bloodshed, but sustained injury to the head and, as a result of that injury, fell into the quarry when he went over there to relieve himself, leaving his car at the roadside.”

“Oh, so he was in a fit state to drive a car when he left the inn, was he?”

“I would not have said so, sir. You will hear that his friends attempted to persuade him not to do so, as they were convinced his injuries would render it injudicious.”

“What is all this about a car?” asked the Bench.

“It is not in dispute, Your Worship,” put in Mapp, “that the accused was alive when he left the inn.”

“I understand,” went on Lestrange, “that the car was found in Yelton.”

“That is so, sir.”

“How did it get there, if Gorinsky fell into the quarry and killed himself?”

“We have no definite information as yet, sir. We are still working on the matter. Our theory is . . .”

“Theories are not facts, are they?”

“They sometimes result in facts becoming apparent, sir.”

“Let the inspector tell his story, Mr. Lestrange,” said the presiding magistrate.

“If it pleases Your Worship. Very well, Inspector, let the court hear this ‘theory’ of yours.”

“We think some person or persons came upon the abandoned car, sir, and drove it away. By the time they got to the outskirts of London, the body had been found and they abandoned the car, fearing to get themselves implicated, knowing they had picked up the car near enough to where the body was lying.”

“That theory goes a long way in covering the facts, Your Worship,” said Mapp.

“Have these drivers-away of unconsidered cars been traced?” asked Lestrange.

“Not so far, sir. We are still working on it. They can’t give us any help over the death itself.”

“Unless, of course, *they* killed Gorinsky in order to steal his car,” said Lestrange.

“Really, Your Worship,” protested Mapp. “That is a ludicrous suggestion. The car wasn’t worth stealing!”

“Then why do you think it was stolen?” demanded Lestrange.

“I do not claim it was stolen, in the exact meaning of the words. I simply suggest that it was driven away.”

“A culpable offence nowadays and, in this case, no different from stealing, particularly as I understand that its number plates had been changed.”

“Another matter which is still under investigation, Your Worship,” put in the inspector hastily.

“Quite so. Have you any more questions to put to this witness, Mr. Lestrange?”

“I thank Your Worship, no.”

The inspector resumed his former place in the court and said,

“Call Clement Smith.” Gracechurchstreet, summoned by the usher, entered the witness box and was sworn.

“Your name is Clement Smith?”

“Trade name—I am a theatrical agent and sometime impresario—Clement Gracechurchstreet.” The death’s-head American then added his temporary address, which was in Southwest London, and the enquiry continued.

“On February twenty-seventh you were at an inn situated two miles or thereabouts from the village of Heathcote Fitzprior?”

“I was.”

“The inn is called the *Swan Revived*?”

“That is so.”

“During the course of the morning were you in a first-floor room which was in use as a temporary gymnasium?”

“I was.”

“Were you a witness to an argument which broke out between David John Holley and Reuben Gorinsky?”

“I sure was, if you call it an argument.”

“How would you yourself describe it, then?”

“An unprovoked—well, an unnecessary assault—without preliminary warning, I suggest—by Holley on Gorinsky.”

“You began by saying ‘unprovoked.’ Why have you amended it to ‘unnecessary’?”

“Well, it was this way. The boy for some days had been mighty sore at Gorinsky on account Gorinsky kept him hard at work over his training and refused him liquor.”

“Liquor? Do you mean spirits?”

“Oh, gosh, no! Beer, sir, which, together with the roast beef of Old England, has made you bulldog Britishers what you are, the finest breed of men in the world, sir—always excepting the fine boys back home in the little old United States of America, of course . . .”

“Yes, yes, Mr. Smith. We are appreciative of your compliments and are admirers of your great country, but could we please keep to the point?”

“Surely, surely.”

“You say that, before the fatal incident into which we are enquiring, there was already ill-feeling between Holley and Mr. Gorinsky?”

“Now there, sir, you are under a misapprehension. There was no ill-feeling *between* them. I mean there was none whatsoever on Gorinsky’s side. He treated that boy, sir, as his own son.”

“Very well. Will you tell the court exactly what happened on the morning in question?”

“I will do just that one little thing. I cannot speak to anything which took place before eleven o’clock that day, but I assoom . . .”

“I’m afraid you mustn’t do that, Mr. Smith. The court, no doubt, will hear all about it from witnesses who were on the spot at the time. Just confine yourself to those points which came within your own knowledge and observation.”

“Pardon *me,* sir.” He bowed to the solicitor and then to the so-far impassive figures on the Bench. “Do I continue?”

“If you please, Mr. Smith. At eleven o’clock what were you doing?”

“I was entering the premises of Mr. Smetton, landlord (as I believe you call him) of the *Swan Revived* hostelry on the Morchester road just outside the world-renowned village of Heathcote Fitzprior, where the great Virginian poet William Heathcote took his rest when his soul was transported to glory.”

The chairman of the Bench gave an exasperated little cough. The solicitor threw him an apologetic glance and continued, somewhat sternly,

“Mr. Smith, I really must ask you to confine yourself solely to the matter in hand. You entered the inn for the purpose of purchasing refreshment, no doubt. Please go on from there.”

“With pleasure and deep respect, sir. I had me a highball, as was my custom, and carried it up the stairs to the gymnasium. There I saw assembled and met together, also as usual, Mr. Gorinsky, the lad Holley, the trainer Scouse, and the sparring-partner Biddle. I watched the sparring-

practice as I downed or swallowed my highball, and then my friend and partner, Mr. Maverick, joined us. He had been putting his car away, the car about which . . .”

“Yes, yes, Mr. Smith. We shall hear all about the car later on. Please continue your eye-witness account,” put in the solicitor.

“Surely. Well, the sparring-practice ended about then, and a guy’s name was mentioned by Holley to which Gorinsky applied an epithet of an indelicate nature, and . . .”

“And that began the argument which led to all the trouble?”

“Well, that’s where it seemed to me Gorinsky had stepped a mite out of line. There is no doubt that the epithet hurt the young guy’s feelings more than a little.”

“I see why you changed your mind about the word ‘unprovoked’,” said the chairman of the Bench. He glanced at the solicitor for the defence, but the dark young man made no sign. “You mean that the attack on Gorinsky *was* provoked, don’t you?—and very definitely provoked, at that.”

“Well, now, Your Honour . . .”

“Your Worship!” hissed the solicitor.

“I beg pardon, Your Worship. I should wish to say I would not go so far as to call it real provocation, but Mr. Gorinsky used words to describe this buddy of Holley’s in a way which was not intentionally offensive, I feel sure, but which I opine the young fellow misunderstood. It is not, as generally used in your great country, an opprobrious epithet, according to my belief, but . . .”

“What were the words?” asked the magistrate.

“I am a little choice in what I pass between my lips, Mr. Magistrate, sir,” said Gracechurchstreet puritanically. “Might I be allowed to write the words down?” He did this, and the slip of paper was passed to the Bench. The chairman read it, passed it to his fellow magistrate, and pursed his lips.

“It seems to be an expression in common use in certain somewhat unrefined circles,” he commented. “I should not have thought it would rouse anybody to insensate fury in this decade. Have you any idea why the accused should have taken so much exception to it, Mr. Mapp?”

“No, sir, I have not,” replied the solicitor.

“Well, perhaps he will tell us himself, when it becomes his turn to speak. Pray go on, Mr. Mapp.”

“Thank you, Your Worship. Now, Mr. Smith, exactly what effect did the use of this expression have on the accused?”

“He knocked Gorinsky flat on his back and rendered him equally unconscious as a dead duck. Then he kicked in the back of his head. Three times he kicked him before we could get him pinioned. He was out of his mind, clean out of his mind. I have never seen anything like it, and should not choose to witness it again.”

“And then?”

“Then Scouse and Biddle hauled the lad away and locked him in his room, while my friend Maverick and I attended to poor Gorinsky.”

“And then?”

“We left Biddle outside the young guy’s bedroom door in case he broke it down, and we did what we could for Gorinsky. He recovered consciousness after a while, and we were anxious to send for a doctor, and would have done so earlier except that the landlord was on the telephone at the time.”

“I should have thought that, in a case which appeared urgent, you could have commandeered the telephone,” said the dark young defending lawyer mildly. “It would seem that you were not unduly worried about the extent of Gorinsky’s injuries.”

“We were anxious not to make trouble for the boy, Your Hon . . . . Your Worship,” said Gracechurchstreet, appealing to the Bench. “Well, Gorinsky wouldn’t hear of having us call a doctor. He was doo in London that afternoon and insisted on keeping his appointment. Of course, he never did keep it. He must have got as far as the stone quarries and vaycated the car so he could vomit, I opine, and contracted a sudden vertigo and tumbled in. Well, that’s how I figure it, and I should wish to enter a special pleading on behalf of the young guy Holley, because . . .”

“That will be all, Mr. Smith,” said Mapp, hastily. “If you do not wish to cross-examine—” the defending lawyer shook his head—“I call Ignatius Clancy.” The inspector handed Maverick the testament. “Your name is Ignatius Clancy?”

“Indeed it is that, sir, although, for business purposes, I am known as John O’Mara Maverick. But a Clancy I was born, and to the name of Clancy will I answer, and God be with old Ireland and the blessed saints defend her.”

“You are not in Ireland now, Mr. Clancy,” said the Bench, “so please confine yourself to giving your evidence.”

“And so I will, sir. This young lawyer fellow—and a fine, upstanding, God-fearing young man I am sure he is—he’ll have all the truth that is in me.”

Laura found herself wondering what amount of truth this would be, and to what extent the defence would challenge it.

“Very well, Mr. Clancy,” said Mapp. “I have only one question to ask you. How many times did you see Holley kick Gorinsky after he had knocked him down?”

“How many times?”

“How many times.”

“Sure now, it’s putting words into me mouth you are. Who said I saw him kick poor Reuben at all, at all?”

“Do you mean you did *not* see a kick or kicks delivered?”

“Well, now, how could I be seeing anything, and me jumping down the stairs seven and maybe eight at a time, to fetch the poor stricken man a glass of brandy?”

“You mean you did not see Holley kick Gorinsky? You are on oath, remember!”

“Ah, well, now, what’s a kick or two between friends? Wasn’t it Tim Reilly was belting me a kick on Patrick’s Day in Skaw-been, and me so strapped up about me ribs by them surgeon fellers I thought I was a cask with the iron bands round me? Sure, now . . .”

“Can’t you control your witness, Mr. Mapp?”

“I beg Your Worship’s pardon. All right, Mr. Clancy. You may stand down, unless Mr. Lestrange wishes to cross-examine.”

Laura scribbled a note to Dame Beatrice. It read:

“What do you think the game is? Are these fellows trying to get Dave off? Much more of this, and the beaks will dismiss the charge. Is that what young Sebastian Lestrange is relying on?”

Dame Beatrice wrote back:

“I don’t know. I fear that the kindlier these witnesses appear, the more the magistrates will suspect that evidence against the boy is being deliberately withheld.”

“Clever, dirty work, you mean?” wrote Laura. Dame Beatrice gave her an alligator’s grin and the next witness was called. As was to be expected,

he turned out to be Christopher Scouse. His identity established and his mentality summed up by the prosecuting solicitor, he was invited to give an account in his own words, of what he had seen in the gymnasium on the morning of the twenty-seventh of February.

"Just in your own words, Mr. Scouse," said Mapp encouragingly. The ape rested two enormous hairy paws on the front edge of the witness box and delivered his testimony.

"I was pickin' me teef arter breakfuss, 'avin' 'oilers in 'em, when the boss, 'e comes up and says like vis. 'E says, 'Wot's come over vat brasted kid?' 'e says. 'Don't seem up to 'is work no more,' 'e says. 'Is 'e staled orf or wot? Or is 'e jest plain sulky?'"

"'I dunno,' I says, 'but I don't fink, in my opinion, as 'ow vat young chap over the station is doin' 'im no sorter good,' I says. 'And now you gorn and put the kybosh on vem trainin' spins,' I says, 'I reckon as 'ow vey've gorn chewin' the fat togevver,' I says, 'and the Rocket's got it up the nose,' I says, 'and maybe needs the facks of life put before 'im,' I says, 'wiv maybe the toe of your boot to 'elp 'im to unnerstand 'em,' I says. 'Good grief,' 'e says, 'the little barsterd 'ud murder me if I touched 'im. But we'll 'ave to do summat,' 'e says. 'Nobody ain't a-goin' to pay good money to watch 'im fight like wot 'e do at present,' 'e says. 'I can't fink wot's come over 'im,' 'e says, 'but if it *is* vat young bugger over the way,' 'e says . . ."

"This is all very interesting, no doubt, Mr. Mapp," said the magistrate, "but I think the time of the court is being wasted. None of this seems to be helpful. Could you try to persuade your witness to get along a little quicker."

"With great respect, Your Worship, he *was* asked to tell his story in his own words."

"He seems to suffer from a surfeit of words. Couldn't you ask him the necessary pertinent questions? He can still use his own words in his answers, you know."

"I am obliged to Your Worship. Now, Mr. Scouse, you saw the attack on Mr. Gorinsky. Will you describe it for us as accurately and as shortly as you can?"

"Ah. Well, look, it was vis way, see. The Rocket takes offence when the boss calls Mr. Sparowe a …" he glanced up at the public gallery . . . "ladies present."

“Your consideration for their delicate ears does you credit, Mr. Scouse,” said Mapp. “Perhaps, Your Worship, we should . . .”

“Well, we have the relevant expression from Mr. Smith,” said the magistrate. “I have it written down here. However, as a check, since the words used constitute some sort of defence against the charge, I think, Mr. Scouse, you had better come up here and murmur these distasteful nothings in my ear. I think, to assess this case fairly, I had better be sure of the terms which were actually employed, so that I can better estimate the amount of provocation which the defendant suffered … Hm, yes, I see,” he went on, when he had heard a hoarse mumbling. “Yes, that agrees with Mr. Smith’s version, and would come under the heading of provocation, undoubtedly, *had it been used to describe the defendant himself*.” He paused impressively. “On the other hand, it was not so used, but was with reference to another person who, I take it, was not even present at the time. However, go on, Mr. Mapp, go on.”

“If Your Worship pleases. Now, Mr. Scouse, you heard the deceased—er, you heard Mr. Gorinsky (for, of course, he wasn’t the deceased at the time, no!) you heard this opprobrious expression used. Tell the court what happened after that.”

“Why, the Rocket up and ’it ’im, and where ’e picked up such a punch as vat one I can’t, and I never shan’t, be able to make aht. Must of sucked it in wiv ’is muvver’s milk and forgot all abaht it till ven, I reckon. It never travelled no more nor six inches, if vat much. First ’e feints wiv ’is left to Gorinsky’s stomick, and ven, as Gorinsky draws back ’is stomick, and ’is ’ead come forward, the Rocket steps wiv the punch and brings in ’is right like—well, gents, I never seed nuffink so beauriful, not in all me born days I never. Dahn goes Gorinsky like ’e’d been ’it be a funderbolt, and as ’e lays there, lookin’ vat peaceful I fought as ’ow ’eaven was ’is ’ome, the Rocket ’oofs ’im in the slats, and ven ’e puts the boot in again afore we ’as time to drag ’im ’orf, and ven we runs ’im up vem stairs and locks ’im in, wiv ’im shahtin’ blue murder all the time.”

“Would it be correct to say that, in your opinion, the accused had gone berserk?”

“Crazy. Just crazy ’e were. Didn’t know wot ’e were a-doin’ of.”

“Well, now,” said the defending solicitor, “you say that the accused kicked Gorinsky in the ribs, and not on the head. Did you see Mr. Gorinsky after he had recovered?”

“Shaky on ’is pins, ’e was, very shaky, but we got ’im on ’is feet orl right afore Mr. Maverick give ’im the brandy.”

“Did you see him drive off from the inn?”

“Ah.”

“In what condition was he then?—at that time? I mean, did you think he was fit to drive?”

“You couldn’t argue wiv the boss.”

“But he wasn’t so ill that any of you attempted to dissuade him?”

“Eh?”

“Did you advise him not to go?”

“Weren’t my place. Besides, our money was all on the Rocket. Gorinsky *’ad* to go and see ter fings the uvver end.”

“Did anyone advise him not to attempt to drive the car?”

“No, I don’t reckon none of us fought abaht it.”

“And were you surprised that you never saw him again?”

“Well, ’e croaked, dinne? ’E croaked in vat vere quarry, bein’ took bad arter bein’ kay-owed and booted.”

“Why did you all scatter when you read the news of his death?”

“We guessed the Rocket ’ad done for ’im, and we didn’t want to get the kid into no trouble, on account ’e never meant it, see?”

“Surely,” said the young lawyer, “it would have been wiser to have gone to the police and told them what you knew?”

“Dunno, sir. We done wot we done for the best, and I’m sorry if we give any trouble. We never meant nuffink by it, on’y to see the Rocket in the clear, our money bein’ on ’im, see?”

The next witness was Harry Biddle, but there was nothing he could add and nothing he could contradict, except that reluctantly he agreed that Dave had kicked Gorinsky on the head and not in the ribs. The only other difference between his evidence and that of Scouse was that he had been set to guard the boy’s bedroom door and had not seen Gorinsky assisted to his feet and given brandy, and he had neither seen nor heard him drive off in Maverick’s little car, and could not speak to his condition at that time. The one item of information which might have helped Dave was not forthcoming, and poor, muddled, punch-drunk Harry was too bemused to think of introducing the subject. The defence, however, was more alert.

“By the way, Mr. Biddle,” young Lestrange said gently, “you agree that your sparring-practice with Holley was over when the incident

occurred, and you agree that Holley kicked Gorinsky on the head or, possibly, in the ribs, or even both. Can you remember what Holley was wearing on his feet?"

"Yes, sir. Boxin' boots, of course. It's on'y natchral. 'E 'adn't 'ad 'is showr nor yet 'e 'adn't changed. Chris 'ad only just took out our gum shields and pulled orf our gloves when Mr. Gorinsky started all on about Mr. Sparowe, and young Dave starts clockin' of 'im."

"I believe boxing-boots are made of exceptionally soft and pliable material, are they not?"

"Vat's right, sir. Dave would 'ave 'urted 'is toe morn 'e would Mr. Gorinsky, if you take my meanin'."

"In that case," said the magistrate, "unless you have any further questions to put to this witness, Mr. Lestrange, I think I should like to take the medical evidence next." Harry, relieved at the prospect of retreat, stood down, and Doctor Francis Pillage was called.

CHAPTER NINE

Remanded In Custody

"'They have something to *conceal*, sir.'
'Well, I rather agree with you. But what are we going to do about it?'
His smile was a thing of infinite sweetness—Rose Maylie rather than Dora Copperfield. He said, with a finicking articulation:
'Skin them alive, sir',"

Charles Mitchell—*Harp on the Willow*

"On March the second this year you were called to examine the body of a man who has been identified as Reuben Gorinsky?" began Mapp, when Doctor Pillage had been sworn.

"That is so."

"Did you form an opinion as to the cause of death?"

"The deceased had been struck on the back of the head with or by some comparatively heavy object and with some suggestion of force, with the result that . . ." He went into considerable medical detail to which everybody in court listened with attention and great respect, but without much comprehension.

"Thank you, Doctor," said Mapp. "And did you form any opinion as to the nature of the comparatively heavy object to which you refer?"

"I cannot be specific. The nature of the wound suggests a rounded object with, possibly, a reinforced base."

"Could it have been a boot?"

"Not unless it was of a very heavy type—an Army boot, say, or the kind worn by mountaineers, but, even so . . ."

"It couldn't have been inflicted by a kick from someone wearing boxing boots, then?" put in Lestrange.

"Hardly. In fact, I would definitely say that it could not."

"Have you ever seen and handled boxing boots, Doctor?" asked Mapp.

"Good heavens, yes! They are extremely light and very pliable footwear. Unless the victim had a congenital aneurysm before he was attacked, a kick, however violent, from a boxing boot, could hardly kill him."

"It would be of great help, then, Doctor, if you could in any way suggest the nature of the instrument by which the deceased met his death.

Could it have been the result of a fall? He was found, as you know, in a stone-quarry."

"It was not, in my opinion, the result of a fall. In such a case I should have expected a significantly shaped depressed fracture of the vault of the skull, indicating the nature of the object on which he struck his head when he fell. I should also have expected, considering the position of the wound, that he would have broken an outflung arm, as well as fracturing his skull, and this was not the case."

"But you are not prepared to hazard an opinion as to the nature of the object which struck him or by which he was attacked?"

"An opinion—no."

"Then could I suggest—it is, of course, clearly understood that you commit yourself to nothing—could I suggest a bottle, probably a full one?"

"A bottle?"

"A bottle, Doctor. It is, as I said, merely a suggestion, and such a tentative one that I have been careful not to mention it sooner."

"I suppose it could have been a bottle, yes, but—"

"Thank you, Doctor. You are satisfied as to the time of death, of course?"

"When I examined the body, it had been dead for approximately forty-eight hours, possibly a little more."

"And you examined it on the second of March, so the 'little more' sounds likely. Thank you again, Doctor."

Then Smetton was called. He agreed with Mapp that, as landlord of an inn, he must have a considerable number of bottles of various shapes and sizes among his stock.

"How often do you check them?" Mapp enquired.

"Once a month in the off season, like it would be between October and April, sir."

"When did you last do any stocktaking?"

"Feb. twenty-seven."

"The day on which your guests departed (somewhat unexpectedly, I believe) for London?"

"That's right, sir. I thought to have put the stocktaking off until the following week, sir, thinking we were too busy, with four them stopping in the house . . ."

“And then, of course, you were expecting the lady,” put in young Lestrange, “and had been making preparations to receive her.”

“The lady? What lady?” demanded Mapp, taken unawares.

“A friend of Mr. Gorinsky’s, so I was told.”

“Oh, well, that has nothing to do with this court,” said Mapp, very hastily indeed.

“All the same, what really made you change your mind about the stocktaking?” pursued Lestrange, giving the witness a very sharp glance.

“I hardly know, sir.” Smetton looked distressfully at Mapp.

“It couldn’t have been because you wanted to be sure you were not any bottles short, of course?” went on Lestrange.

“Well, sir,” said the witness, “in fairness to the four gents, I did want to be quite sure, if you see what I mean, sir.”

“Quite. And *were* you a bottle short?”

“There was a Dubonnet I couldn’t account for,” confessed the witness. “It was easy enough to check, because, until I get the summer trade, which is mostly tourists, sir, I don’t stock Dubonnet, there being no call for it locally, so I knew I had only three bottles in stock, and when I come to check, there was only two.”

“And what did you think about that?”

“Couldn’t make nothing of it, sir. None of the gents ever touched the stuff, as far as I was aware. Mr. Gorinsky drank whisky—Scotch, sir—Mr. Gracechurchstreet, he preferred Bourbon, which I get in for American visitors, that and Canadian rye, and Mr. Maverick, he liked the Irish blend, so, except for the Scotch, which I always stock, I had got in the Bourbon and the Irish whiskey specially for the two gents, and I could account for what was left. The other two, Mr. Scouse and Mr. Biddle, they were beer drinkers, and the young fellow over there, he didn’t have hardly nothing but bitter lemon or barley water, on account of keeping his weight down. My other regulars was beer drinkers, too, so I can’t make out, not for the life of me I can’t, what become of that bottle of Dubonnet.”

“Not your wife, I suppose . . . ?” suggested Lestrange.

“Guinness was hers, sir, half of Guinness mid-morning and again in the evening, and her cousin, as worked for us, the same. Never took nothing else, except it might be a port and lemon of a Sunday night, but that was only very occasional.”

“Did you search for the missing bottle, or ask any questions about it?”

“I had a good look round, and I double-checked my lists, sir. As for asking any questions, well, it wouldn’t be for the best, sir, customers taking offence, if you see what I mean, sir.”

“Customers, I take it, would not include the lad Holley? Now, Mr. Smetton, perhaps you would give us your version of what happened at the *Swan Revived* on the morning of February twenty-seventh and subsequently,” said Mapp.

“Yes, sir. The party had breakfast as usual, well not quite as usual, now I come to think, because Mr. Gorinsky wasn’t down, so I thought maybe he was upstairs with the lady—”

“Never mind the lady, Mr. Smetton. What happened after breakfast?”

“Well, sir, Mr. Gorinsky come in by the side door and joined the others in the sitting-room we give them, and then, after about an hour, they all went up to the ballroom, which they had the use of as a gym, and I heard their feet pounding about, as usual, and then I heard a fracas.”

“Did you go and investigate?”

“Not me, sir, no. It were no business of mine, as I could see. There was shouting and rampaging, and then Mr. Maverick, he come pounding down the stairs and calls for brandy.”

“I understand that Mr. Maverick—known to this court as Clancy—was not in residence at the inn.”

“That’s right, sir. Him and Mr. Gracechurchstreet was stopping somewhere in Morchester, though as to exactly *where* I never enquired, it being none of my business. They used to drop in every morning to have a drink and watch young Dave at work. They come in regular just as soon as I opened, and went off again at half twelve.”

“So, when the disturbance began, they were both in the gymnasium, but they had not been at breakfast?” said young Lestrange.

“That’s right, sir.”

“Did Mr. Clancy say why the brandy was needed?” asked Mapp, not relishing the interruption but obtaining no support from the Bench.

“He said: ‘That young fool has been and gone and done it’—or words to that effect, sir. I said, ‘Done what?’ He said as how that Dave had tooken umbrage—or words to that effect—and had knocked Mr. Gorinsky cold. So I poured out a stiffish brandy and give it to him in a big glass so he wouldn’t spill none going up the stairs—him having what you might call an unsteady sort of a hand, sir, what with the shock, and up he goes, and then I

heard another sort of fracas which I thought was on the stairs up to the attics, and then mother—that's to say, my missus, Mrs. Smetton, sir—come out of the kitchen into the bar and says to me to know what's going on. 'Sounds like that lot are murdering each other,' she said."

"Did she use those actual words? 'Murdering one another'?"

"That she did, sir. Then she says 'Aren't you going to do anything about it? This is a respectable house, and you know I never wanted them here in the first place,' she said. So I said, 'Look, love, it's not up to me to interfere. I don't want to get mixed up,' I said. 'Best leave them to sort it out for themselves. It's that boy,' I said. 'I been watching him some days now,' I said, 'and he's brooding. That's what he's doing—*brooding*. You can't trust these teenagers nowadays,' I said, 'Drink and dope and sex and ton-up motor-bikes,' I said. 'They don't know what they're doing half the time.'"

"So you took no part in the affair. What *did* you do?"

"Stopped in the bar, sir, same as usual. Then, after a bit, I heard a car drive off. 'That's Mr. Maverick's little bus,' I says to myself. Then the next thing I know, Mr. Gracechurchstreet, he comes into the bar and says, 'Plans has been changed,' he says. 'We've had a sudden call to London. Mr. Gorinsky is still very shaky,' he says, 'but he's gone off ahead of us to sort things out, and we're to pay the bill and follow immediate.'"

"'But what about the next fortnight?' I says. 'I've had you living here at great inconvenience,' I says, 'and you're due to stay another fortnight. I've got it all down in the book,' I says. Well, he turned very nasty at that, and the others, Maverick and Scouse, they come down the stairs and all three on 'em my side of the counter and looking like starting something if I made any objections, so I charged 'em what they owed me and added on the Dubonnet, which they never queried, and called it a day. Then they went out the saloon bar door with Biddle and the lad Holley and I heard the big car drive off, and that's as much as I know."

"So you saw Smith, Clancy, and Scouse leave with Holley and Biddle, but not Gorinsky. Is that right?" asked Lestrange.

"On account of the back stairs, sir, which lead to the side door into the yard and the car park. I took it Mr. Gorinsky had slipped out that way, it being the quickest way to where Mr. Maverick used to leave his car, though what he would want with it—"

"Your wife and her cousin, where were they?"

“In the kitchen, getting dinner ready, sir.”

“Ah, yes. Which way does the kitchen window face?”

“Towards the yard, sir.”

“The yard which was used by your guests as a car-park?”

“Yes, sir, that’s right.”

“So when Mr. Gorinsky drove off in Mr. Maverick’s car, one or both of the ladies could have seen him?”

“If they’d happened to look out of the window.”

“Isn’t it natural to glance out of a window when you hear a car start up?”

“It would depend on what you were doing at the moment, I suppose, sir.”

“Very true. Now you said earlier on in your evidence that Mr. Gorinsky was not at breakfast with the others, and that that was not usual. You then said that you thought he might be upstairs with the lady whom my learned colleague dismissed so summarily from the scene.”

“That’s right, sir.”

“Later on you said that after breakfast Mr. Gorinsky came in by the side door.”

“Yes.”

“Did you actually see him come in?”

“No, sir, not to say I actually *seen* him.”

“What makes you think he did come in that way, then?”

“Well, sir, the only other door as he could have used was the door what leads into the bar, sir, and I know he never used that, because I was in the bar from breakfast time onwards and I would be bound to have seen him come in.”

“In other words, you cannot say, of your own knowledge, that Mr. Gorinsky *did* go out early that morning, and was out while the others were breakfasting?”

“Well, no, sir, but when the lady wasn’t at breakfast neither, nor was she nor Gorinsky upstairs when Daffy took up the early tea, I concluded as how Mr. Gorinsky had drove the lady to the station and that’s how she come to be missing, and him not joining the rest of ’em at the table.”

“You say ‘drove the lady to the station’. Did you hear the car drive off, then, before breakfast?”

“Not as I recollect, sir.”

“Or come back?”

“No, sir, but I might not have heard either, being as I was in the bar.”

“Quite so. And neither your wife nor her cousin mentioned anything about it?”

“No, sir, not as I remember. I don’t pay all that attention to women’s chatter.”

“Perhaps you are wise. Let us leave the point. It is immaterial, so we will return to the time when you claim you *did* hear Mr. Maverick’s car drive off. Are you quite certain about this?”

“Why—why, yes, sir. It was some little time after I heard the fracas upstairs.”

“And Mr. Gorinsky was driving?”

“Well, he must have been, sir, else how did he get to the stone quarries?”

“Ah, that is the point, is it not? You see, Mr. Smetton, if we could be sure that he was driving, we could also be sure that he was alive when he left your inn. On the other hand, if he was *not* driving, it is possible that his murderer was conveying his body to the quarry where it was found, and that the murderer could not have been the defendant because he was locked in his room at the time.”

“But Gorinsky *was* driving! He must have been, sir!”

“Why are you so certain?” It was clear that the witness was anything but certain. Moreover, the inspector was turning purple. Lestrange pursued his advantage. “You heard what you term ‘the fracas’ upstairs?”

“Yes.”

“You testify in support of Mr. Maverick’s evidence that he came down to the bar for brandy?”

“Yes.”

“You agree that you heard my client, Mr. Holley, being forced upstairs to his room?”

“Well, it sounded like that.”

“And you have heard other witnesses agree that he was locked up there until the party, with the exception of Mr. Gorinsky, left your inn?”

“Yes.”

“And you can bring no evidence to refute that?”

“Nobody asked me, but, anyway, no, I can’t.”

“So I repeat that if Mr. Gorinsky was driven off or drove himself away from the inn in Mr. Maverick’s car, and my client was locked in his room when this happened and was then in the company of others until the party reached London, he could not have had any hand in Gorinsky’s death, could he? And,” went on Lestrange, without giving the witness time to collect his thoughts, “that brings us back to the lady whom you declare on oath that you allowed into the inn at or about midnight. I submit, Your Worship,” said Lestrange, addressing the Bench, “that this lady could have driven Gorinsky, *dead or alive*, to the stone-quarry, and that she could then have taken the car to London where it was found.”

“That’s if there ever *was* such a lady,” said Mapp. “Personally, I think she’s a myth.”

“Then how do you think the body got into the stone-quarry and the car to a London suburb?” retorted Lestrange.

“The inspector’s evidence covered that, I thought.”

“I think, perhaps, we had better adjourn for lunch,” said the chairman. “The court will be in session again at a quarter-past two precisely.”

The lady, however, remained a bone of contention. The recalled witnesses denied, with stolid obstinacy, that she had ever arrived at the inn. Scouse went so far as to admit that he and Gorinsky had gone to Morchester station to meet her train, but claimed that she had not materialized. Gracechurchstreet and Maverick could not testify one way or the other, since they had not been staying at the inn, and Dave and Harry claimed to have been in bed by the time Scouse and Gorinsky had returned from the station. Smetton, pressed hard, began to hedge.

“Well, how many persons *did* you admit to your premises that night?” asked Lestrange.

“Well, actually, two, sir. I *thought* at first that one was the lady, and that she come in with Scouse while Gorinsky was putting the car away, but, come to think of it, there wasn’t a light at the side door—I let ’em in by the side door as it leads to the back stairs, sir—so I suppose I must have made a mistake.”

“My information is that you told a witness, whom I may call later, that one of them was a lady. Did you speak to them?”

“I just said, ‘Oh, here you are, then. The room is all ready.’ And Scouse said, ‘Good work, matey. Just leave the door. We’ll shoot the bolts.’ ”

“I suggest that what Scouse really said was, ‘Gorinsky is putting the car away. He’ll shoot the bolts when he comes in,’” said Lestrange.

“The so-called lady did not speak to you? You didn’t hear a woman’s voice?” asked Mapp, thinking it well to intervene.

“No, sir, I never heard her speak.”

“Well, it doesn’t sound very satisfactory,” remarked the magistrate. “Had you been to bed before you let them in?”

“Yes, and asleep, sir.”

“But you knew they would have to be admitted?”

“Well, no, sir, me not knowing quite when to expect them, and asking them particular not to hammer on the side door to wake my wife up, her being a very light sleeper, I’d left the door on the latch.”

“But you did think that Scouse was accompanied by a woman, and that he asked you to leave the door unbolted for Gorinsky, didn’t you?” said Lestrange.

“I believe I did say that at one point, sir, but I was a bit mazed with sleep, I daresay, and I *could* be mistook, I suppose, either way. I haven’t much recollection, thinking nothing of it at the time.”

“Mr. Scouse seems quite clear that he was with Mr. Gorinsky at the side door when you opened it, and that you retired and went back up the stairs, leaving the two of them to follow,” said Mapp, “and you now agree that, being suddenly aroused from slumber, as you were, and expecting a lady, as you were, you rather hazily *thought* that she had arrived, but realized afterwards that you had been mistaken?”

“I think that might have been likely, sir.”

“Why has he decided to change his story?” wrote Laura to Dame Beatrice. “He told Toby . . .”

“*Force majeure*. He still believes he *did* see the woman,” Dame Beatrice scribbled back, “but he knows he’s being bullied.”

“Well,” said the magistrate, “as the witness seems to have retracted what must, in the first place, have been a rather wild statement, I think we may regard the lady as a myth. In other words, the lady vanishes.” He smiled, well-pleased with his neat quip. “Have you any further witnesses, Inspector?”

“Not for the prosecution, Your Worship.”

“Then I call David Holley,” said Lestrange.

“Let’s hope he’s doing the right thing!” scribbled Laura.

Dave was conducted to the witness box and sworn.

"I only want to say as I plead innocent," he said. "I *did* kay-owe Mr. Gorinsky, and I'm not denyin' I may 'ave put the boot in, but I never 'it 'im wiv no bottles and I was locked in me room when vey tookened 'im away."

"We have no evidence that anybody took him away. The weight of the evidence is that, although, in the opinion of his friends, he was in no fit state to do so, he drove towards London in Mr. Maverick's car," said the magistrate. "Do you care to continue, Mr. Lestrange?"

"I am greatly obliged to Your Worship. Now, Mr. Holley, please answer my questions as concisely as you can. You say that you did not strike Mr. Gorinsky with anything except your fist and a boxing boot?"

"Vat's right. I only . . ."

"Quite. Were you wearing boxing-gloves as well as boxing boots at the time?"

"No. I 'ad finished sparrin' wiv 'Arry, so . . ."

"Quite so. You made a considerable amount of noise, I believe, before you actually attacked Mr. Gorinsky?"

"I was proper mad at Gorinsky, see, on account 'e called Tobe a . . ."

"Yes, he called Mr. Sparowe by an opprobrious name. But you *did* give him plenty of time to defend himself, did you not?"

"Told 'im wot I fought of 'im, yus."

"Then what happened?"

"Ven I 'it 'im and 'e takes the count and ven 'Arry and Chris, vey 'ustles me up the stairs and locks me in me room."

"And that is all you knew until the time came for you to leave the inn?"

"I talks to 'Arry froo the door, and 'e says, 'You been and gorn and done it, mate,' 'e says."

"And what did you understand by that?"

"Why, vat Mr. Gorinsky would gimme the push."

"Turn you out of his training camp?"

"Yur, vat's right."

"And then what happened?"

"Vey come for me and 'Arry, and we got into Mr. Gorinsky's car and druv to Lunnon."

"And you never saw Mr. Gorinsky again?"

"Vat's right. So I never."

“You then went from London to Yorkshire. What happened there?”

“Mr. Gracechurchstreet and Mr. Maverick and Chris, vey walked aht on me and ’Arry.”

“How was that?”

“I dunno. Told us to come back in two days’ time to the ’otel where vey was stayin’ and when we went vey’d scarpered.”

“How long did it take you to get from London to Leeds?”

“Free days.”

“How was that, then?”

“Us wented wiv the fair to Doncaster, stoppin’ orf at Stamford.”

“It seems early in the year for a fair to be on the road. Did it play, so to speak, at Stamford?”

“No. We stops the night, vat’s all.”

“And at Doncaster?”

“We leaves the fair at Doncaster and goes on to Leeds.”

“Where you and Mr. Biddle were given a room and told to join the others at the hotel in a couple of days?”

“Vat’s right. But when we got vere vey’d scarpered, like I said.”

“You are quite sure that Mr. Gorinsky wasn’t with them?”

“’E didn’t never meet us in Lunnon, and I never see ’im arter I plastered ’im at the pub.”

“Thank you, Mr. Holley.”

Mapp rose to cross-examine.

“You say that Mr. Gorinsky did not accompany the party to Leeds?”

“Vat’s right. ’E never.”

“Then how do you account for the fact that his signature is in the hotel register there?”

Dave stared stolidly at him and then replied,

“’E never wented to Leeds. ’E was croaked be ven.”

“Oh, he was, was he? How do you know that?”

“Read it in the pipers.”

“I agree that, according to the medical evidence, Mr. Gorinsky *was* dead by the time you got to Leeds, but we haven’t accounted for the fact that he seems to have signed the hotel register at the same time as Mr. Smith and Mr. Clancy did. I suggest that, knowing Mr. Gorinsky was dead, you wrote his name in the register because you thought it would confuse the issue and cover up your crime.”

“I submit, Your Worship,” protested young Lestrange, “that that is a fantastic suggestion.”

“The point is readily settled,” said the magistrate. “Have you a transcript of the signature in the hotel register, Inspector? Thank you. Now, Mr. Holley, perhaps you would be good enough to write your name on this piece of paper. Just dash it off as you would your usual signature.”

Dave complied, although his interpretation of dashing it off hardly gave any meaning to those words. In a painstaking, schoolboy hand he wrote *D. J. Holley* and the paper was handed up to the magistrate, who scrutinised it.

“Now,” said the latter, “write *R. Gorinsky*.” Dave did so, and spelt the name correctly.

“There is no similarity, so far as I can see, between these two samples of handwriting and the Inspector’s transcript from the hotel register,” said the chairman.

“Thank you, Your Worship. Call Tobias Sparowe,” said Lestrange.

“Now, Toby, do your stuff,” muttered Laura.

“Mr. Sparowe, I am told that you once received a note purporting to come from Mr. Gorinsky. Did you keep it?”

“As it happens, I did.”

“May I ask why?”

“I had an idea it might be libellous, and I wondered whether I might not decide to take action.”

“May His Worship see the note?”

Toby handed it over. The magistrate read it and remarked that it seemed to bear the same interpretation, although couched in less offensive terms, as the expression used by Gorinsky which had led to Dave’s knocking him down.

“Moreover, the signature seems to tally with that in the hotel register,” he remarked. “Most mysterious, Mr. Lestrange, as it seems impossible that Gorinsky could have been in Leeds on the date in question.”

“If I may be allowed to continue with the witness, Your Worship, I think an explanation may be forthcoming. Mr. Sparowe, are you certain in your own mind that your note came from Gorinsky?”

“No, I am not,” said Toby. “In the light of what I now know, I think the sentiments were those of Gorinsky, but I believe the note was written by Gracechurchstreet *alias* Smith.”

"*Alias* is perhaps an unfortunate word in this context, Mr. Sparowe," said the magistrate mildly. "It smacks of the criminal courts."

"I beg Your Worship's pardon, and will amend it to *née* Smith, if that will meet the case."

"Admirably, Mr. Sparowe. Pray continue, Mr. Lestrange."

"I am obliged to Your Worship. Now, when you say 'in the light of what I now know,' Mr. Sparowe, are you referring to the date of Gorinsky's death?"

"Not altogether. It seems to me that whereas Gorinsky saw Holley first and foremost as a prospective professional boxer, Gracechurchstreet was concerned to preserve the boy's good looks in order to use him in a film. It was in his interests that Holley should not undertake a professional bout until after the film was made. On his own showing, Gracechurchstreet is an impresario and his sole commitments are to the theatre, films, and television. I suggest that the signature on my note and the signature in the hotel register (which, I may say, I have seen and recognized), were both written by Gracechurchstreet in Gorinsky's name."

"But Gracechurchstreet's own name appears in the hotel register," put in Mapp.

"Written by Scouse," said Toby flatly.

"Your Worship," said the inspector, "I suggest that, rather than involve the court in this sort of wild speculation, which, at present, can lead nowhere, I should ask Your Worship to remand Holley in custody for another week, during which the police will renew their enquiries, so that these matters can be settled."

CHAPTER TEN

Stymied

> "We were cruising the upper reaches on our way to Oxford when some boys began throwing stones on to the boat from a bridge. I was a young schoolmaster in those days, and spoke with the voice of authority.
> 'Stop it!' I shouted. One of the boys grinned down at me.
> 'Who d'you think *you* are?—Old Father Thames?' he retorted.
> Of course he knew I couldn't get at him, and so did I."
>
> R. J. Mitchell, J.P. *Oral Reminiscences*

"Well, what are we going to do next?" asked Laura, after dinner in the Stone House that evening. "One thing about it, that last crack from the Bench about a witness summons showed what the chairman thought of Gracechurchstreet and company. Anyway, I'm sure that boy is innocent, so we'll have to get busy and prove it. I don't believe even the inspector really thinks he's guilty. It's just that he seems the only person with any shadow of a motive."

"Oh, no, he doesn't, you know," said Toby. "There's Gracechurchstreet, who doesn't want Dave to do any boxing until he's made that film for television. If he and Gorinsky fell out over that, anything may have happened."

"To kill a man for such a reason as that seems going rather to extremes," said Sebastian Lestrange. "I believe firmly in my client's innocence in so far as I can't think he intended to do Gorinsky any lasting harm when he hit him, but I must admit that to crowm a man with a bottle is within anybody's scope, and the pub offered every advantage in that respect. One has to accept that the means and the opportunity were obvious, no matter what the motive may have been."

"But there would have been witnesses, just the same as there were when Dave knocked the man down and kicked him," argued Laura. "Why didn't any of them say they'd seen Dave do it? Why did it have to be dragged out of the doctor that the job could have been done by somebody swinging a bottle?"

“The difficulty is to see how it all came about, this bottle business, I mean,” said Toby. “It’s not as though the row took place in the bar, and there wouldn’t have been bottles lying about in that room upstairs which they used as a gym.”

“Beer bottles possibly, but certainly not a bottle of Dubonnet,” agreed Laura. “Well, where do we go from here?”

“I shall go to the *Swan Revived*,” said Dame Beatrice, “and acquaint myself with the field of battle.”

“Do I go with you?”

“No. I should prefer that you went to Leeds and called at the hotel where the party of three men stayed the night. Toby may like to go with you, if he can spare the time. What you will find out I cannot determine, but some pointer might emerge.”

“Oh, we’ll manage something. What about you, Sebastian?”

“I shall see my client again and try to prise something helpful out of him. He is a singularly obtuse fellow,” said the young lawyer, “but he must surely know more about the whole business than he’s admitted so far.”

“I’ll go with Laura to Leeds,” said Toby, “certainly.”

“Let’s first see where we stand,” said Sebastian. “What do you think, Grandmother?”

“I shall be able to tell you, perhaps, when I have visited the place which, at present, we must call ‘the scene of the crime.’ What are the rest of you thinking?”

“Well,” said Laura, “the inspector’s a bit foxed, but he still thinks Dave did it and that he’ll get a committal after the next hearing, so it’s up to you to prove which of that lovely lot did it—and why. And what about the girl? She *did* come to the pub that night, and Smetton knows it, and has been manoeuvred out of sticking to his story. You don’t think one of them did for her as well, do you?”

“I retain an almost open mind. Anyhow, I believe young Mr. Holley will be safer in custody while we pursue our enquiries. The Bench have taken a weight off my mind.” Laura looked at her, but Dame Beatrice said no more on that particular subject, so Laura went on:

“After all, the girl seems to have been Gorinsky’s friend, and it might be as well, from somebody’s point of view, that she wasn’t left alive to tell any tales.”

“It is possible, I suppose,” said Dame Beatrice.

“I thought Sebastian took a fearful risk putting a half-wit like young Dave into the box.”

“Yes, it isn’t often done in a magistrate’s court. I was a little surprised, too, to see a reporter present. These cases are often held *in camera*, as being fairer to the defendant.”

“I suppose the police will have to look into the matter of that signature in the hotel register at Leeds?”

“Oh, yes. It cannot be ignored. It was intentionally misleading.”

“I suppose the murderer had banked on the body not being found until very much later, when they were all in America or somewhere.”

“They will plead that Gorinsky, for some reason to them unknown, had *asked* them to sign in for him, and that nobody was more surprised and shocked than they when they read in the papers that he was dead.”

“What do you think was the real motive for the murder?”

“Well, they were after bigger game than a boxing promotion and an educational film, I fancy.”

“And Gorinsky got in the way?”

“Well, it seems that someone didn’t like him. But the person who knows most about the circumstances is Toby here,” said Dame Beatrice.

Edited and pieced together, the story, as it appeared to Toby, was as follows: on the morning of the day on which the party left the *Swan Revived* for London, Dave, whose own account of the matter was substantially in agreement with that of the other witnesses, had knocked Gorinsky down because Gorinsky had referred to Toby in the opprobrious terms employed by vulgar persons with no reference to their technical meaning, but which had left Dave in no doubt as to what Gorinsky really intended to insinuate.

Dave had then proceeded to kick Gorinsky on the head, and this was not disputed, even by the youth himself. However, as Dave had been wearing boxing boots at the time, it was not likely that the kick had caused serious damage. Moreover, the boy had been dragged away immediately, rushed up to the attic floor, and locked in his room. At this point Gorinsky was almost certainly alive, although he had been knocked out.

The next set of stories told by the witnesses also tallied. Harry had been told to stand guard over the door behind which Dave was incarcerated, and to talk him into a quieter frame of mind. The boy had been a prisoner for over an hour and a half, during which time Gorinsky’s murder could have been effected and his body disposed of in the stone quarry. The only

dangerous witnesses of such proceedings, the two innocents, Dave and the stupid, good-natured Harry, had both been got out of the way and could have known nothing of the matter. The only question was whether the murder had been committed at the inn or elsewhere. The fact that the body had been thrown into the quarry did nothing to clear up this point.

The witnesses' accounts (agreed upon, no doubt, beforehand) were that Gorinsky had been helped to his feet as soon as he came round and given brandy and a seat in the first-floor ball-room-cum-gymnasium where the quarrel had taken place; that he had seemed "very groggy," but that he had announced his determination to go to London immediately in accordance with a pre-arranged plan; that the others had attempted to dissuade him, as they did not think he was in a fit state to drive; that nothing would cause him to change his mind, and that, in the end, they had had to let him go and were to meet him in London later in the day, when his business with the proprietor of the travelling fair had been concluded.

Here Sebastian Lestrange added his quota. He had learned that, after this, the stories became a little confused, but were not entirely incompatible with one another. According to Dave, whose story was unchanged from the one he had told Toby, although, this time, it received some apparently insignificant additions, he was bundled into Gorinsky's big car between Harry and Chris and no stop was made except to pick up some petrol until they pulled up for lunch in Aldershot. After lunch they had gone by way of Farnborough and Bagshot to Staines and from Staines on to London. He knew nothing of London west of the Elephant and Castle, but he thought the place where he and Harry were given a room was somewhere in Shepherds Bush.

Here they were told they would spend the night. The room was above a café where they were told to eat and where no bill I would be presented. They had a meal and spent the rest of the evening in a pub. Where the others spent the night Dave had no idea. They had said they were going to meet Gorinsky. Chris came for Harry and Dave on the following morning at ten and drove them to Yelton, where the travelling fair was parked, and from there they all went on to Doncaster. There had been no sign of Gorinsky, now said to be in hospital. Gracechurchstreet was the man in charge of the party.

Questioned by Sebastian, Dave had confessed that he was at first not unduly worried when Gorinsky failed to show up. His chief feeling was for

himself. The promised bout in Hoxton at the Ironbridge Baths had not so much as been mentioned, so no explanation had been forthcoming as to the reason for its having been abandoned. He supposed that having to go into hospital had changed Gorinsky's plans and (said Dave, belligerent but scared and embarrassed) accounted for his non-appearance. It was later that he began to be apprehensive.

There had been no exhibition boxing at the fair when it set up just outside Doncaster, but this, Chris had explained to Dave, was because they were waiting for a van which was to collect the gear from the *Swan Revived*, for they had brought nothing away with them but suitcases.

"But they unloaded ropes and posts and things in that Leeds hotel," put in Toby.

"I know," said Sebastian. "We shall have to work on that. It does seem strange, certainly. I mean, why unload stuff like that just for one night? Why couldn't it stay in the car?"

From Doncaster the party had gone on to Leeds. Dave did not know whether the fair had followed. This, with its vans, travelled slowly, so the car party would have been far ahead of it. The rest of Dave's story tallied with what he had told Toby. Questioned about his reason for trying to stow away at Southampton, he said that the news of Gorinsky's death, and the knowledge that his body had been found not far from the *Swan Revived*, had caused him to panic, as it was known he had knocked Gorinsky down.

"They'll never bring it in as anything worse than a case of manslaughter with diminished responsibility," said Laura. "After all, if Gorinsky was capable of driving away in Maverick's car . . ."

"Ah, but was he?" asked Sebastian. "If he was, how did his body get into the quarry?"

"He could have turned giddy and tumbled in, couldn't he? I'm sure that's the explanation."

"The doctor doesn't think so, and we must accept the medical evidence, I feel. My own theory is that he was killed at the inn by one of the others after Dave and Biddle had been got out of the way, and I think that's my grandmother's theory, too."

"But if Gorinsky was murdered at the inn, who drove Maverick's car to London and abandoned it there?" asked Toby. "According to all the evidence, all five of the party drove to London together in Gorinsky's car but without Gorinsky. Well, the story that he drove off in Maverick's car

must be a lie, because Gorinsky never arrived in London but the car did. Oh . . . unless . . .”

“Yes,” said Dame Beatrice encouragingly, “that solution has already been suggested, I think.”

“That young woman who came that night—the night before Gorinsky was killed! *That’s* the solution, of course. But could she be the murderer, or was she somebody’s stooge?”

“There is only the landlord’s evidence that she ever arrived at the inn, you know,” said Sebastian, “and, under pressure, he was prepared to retract it.”

“Well, we seem to be up a gum tree, don’t we?” said Laura, “and I agree with Toby. We must find that woman.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Georgics

"Old Satan's a liar and a conjurer, too . . .
What you going to do when your lamp burns down?"

Anon.—*Negro Spiritual*

"Well, my own belief is that in pursuing this will o' the wisp of a young woman we shall be wasting our time," said Dame Beatrice, more flatly and forthrightly than was her wont. "We have a week before us in which to clear matters up to our own satisfaction and, I hope, to that of the police. The outstanding questions as I see them are, first, why are lies being told about Gorinsky's driving away from the inn in Maverick's car; second, why was he murdered; third, what caused the party to go first to London and then to Doncaster and Leeds . . ."

"I thought that was to travel with the fair and put on the boxing shows," said Toby.

"No boxing appears to have taken place."

"But wasn't that because of Gorinsky's death?"

"Then why go to London and Yorkshire at all? At least, London, possibly, but certainly not Yorkshire. When Gorinsky did not join them, even any innocent parties among them must have suspected that something untoward had happened to him. No. The expedition to Yorkshire had to be carried out with or without Gorinsky, and it had nothing to do with displays of boxing. Well, now, Toby, reverting to a previous plan, will you let your station residence to me while you and Laura are in Leeds? It would give me a convenient base from which to work, and would occasion no surprise in the neighbourhood, since I believe you told me that you make a practice of letting it from time to time."

She took up her quarters there on the following day accompanied by her chauffeur George and her young maidservant Zena, leaving her French servants in charge at the Stone House. George, who had been in her service for very many years, made no comment, either in words or demeanour, at the sight of their new domicile, but Zena, young and uninhibited, exclaimed, as they inspected the station premises,

"Oh, madam! However shall we manage?"

“I have arranged that George shall sleep at the inn across the way. You will have the spare room here and I shall occupy the principal bedroom. You will bring me early tea, as usual. Our other meals will be catered for at the inn. It is only for a week,” replied her mistress, “and my business here is important.”

“Very good, madam, but it’s more like livin’ in a pig-sty after what we been accustomed to, me and you,” said the artless maiden.

The amenities of the station house were indeed far to seek, but her employer’s cheerful acceptance of draughty rooms and inadequate plumbing reassured the girl to some extent, although she remained convinced that the place harboured mice and that her employer was more than likely to end up with pneumonia. Dame Beatrice, however, lost no time in introducing her to Mrs. Smetton and Daffy, and she was immediately invited to spend her off-duty hours, which were many, in the kitchen of the *Swan Revived*.

George was more usefully employed. His first duty was to drive Dame Beatrice to the village of Heathcote Fitzprior to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Spreadapple. Owing to the fact that Dame Beatrice had been told that it was situated almost directly opposite the entrance to the churchyard, there was no difficulty in finding her cottage and even less in obtaining speech with its occupant, for, as soon as George, obeying instructions, had parked the car on the grass verge, Mrs. Spreadapple emerged after the manner of Betsy Trotwood and ordered that it should be moved.

“Oh, dear, I am so sorry,” said Dame Beatrice mendaciously but in her beautiful voice. “Are we obstructing your view of the lych-gate?”

“I don’t have cars on my verge.”

“Cars? I should hardly have thought it would run to the plural in so small and remote a hamlet. Do you have much trouble that way, then? Surely . . .”

“Trouble?” exclaimed Mrs. Spreadapple. “Nothing else but! You’d be surprised. Oh, well, no, I suppose you wouldn’t, seeing you’ve done the same thing yourself. You’ll have to move it unless you want a summons for trespass.”

“Dear me!” Dame Beatrice turned to the chauffeur. “Do you think you could find a parking-place which will not annoy anybody, George? When I have seen the Heathcote grave, perhaps you would return here and show me

where you have left the car." She leered benignly at Mrs. Spreadapple. "I'm so sorry you've been inconvenienced."

"They all come to see the grave," said Mrs. Spreadapple in a mollified tone, "but that gives them no right to park on my verge. I had the same trouble in London. Street parking, you know. Bang outside the front gate, with never a suggestion that one might be having visitors who might also want to park there. Most frustrating and annoying, and I must say I expected more consideration when I retired down here, but no! One does not get it. Modern manners and morals! *Morals*, indeed!"

This speech, and the appearance of her antagonist, solved one of Dame Beatrice's minor problems. She had been puzzled and surprised to learn that a countrywoman in a Dorsetshire village had gone to the lengths of appealing to the local council, and then had had recourse to the village policeman, to abate what she considered a nuisance and a trespass.

Dorset villagers, like other country folk, have their prejudices and can display a certain amount of cunning in overcoming opposition and in getting the best of a bargain, but they are not belligerent and they are not, as a rule, inclined to appeal to the authorities, for these, in the main, they distrust. Moreover they are courteous and kind, make good neighbours and have a habit of keeping their word and of being pleasant and helpful to strangers. Mrs. Spreadapple did not appear to have perpetuated this image, and the reason for her attitude was at last made clear.

"You are a Londoner, and have suffered suburban frustration, I take it," said Dame Beatrice, as George resumed his seat at the wheel and drove gently away from the cottage.

"I come from London," said Mrs. Spreadapple, "but my husband was a Dorset man. That's why I came down here to live, thinking to get a bit of peace, but all they do is to leave their beastly little cars on my verge. Well, I taught one lot a lesson. I had their horrid little bone-shaker driven away, and then called on the village constable and lodged a complaint."

"That was very enterprising of you," said Dame Beatrice. "That must have nonplussed them very considerably."

"Considering that I made my son drive it away and leave it dumped, I should think it did," said Mrs. Spreadapple, with an evil chuckle. "Come in and have a cup of tea. I always make one in the middle of the morning."

"Thank you very much. You are very kind." Dame Beatrice followed her unconventional hostess into the thatched cottage. "Does your son live

with you?”

“Oh, no, but he was on embarkation leave from his regiment so I didn’t see how he could get into any trouble unless he was stopped by the police, and, of course, he wasn’t. He drove the car to London—that’s if he obeyed my instructions—and left it parked outside the Yelton town hall.”

“I wonder what happened to it?” said Dame Beatrice innocently.

“I’ve no idea. The police came here sometime later to ask me whether I was sure the number I had given the constable was the correct one. Well, of course I was sure. I’d made a special note of the number before my son left the village, just in case of anything cropping up later.”

“You mean a charge of unlawfully driving the car away? That, I believe, is an indictable offence nowadays, even if there is no intention to deprive the owner permanently of his vehicle.”

“Stealing it, you mean. Well, I know nothing about the law, but, if trouble came of what I’d done, I didn’t want my son to take the blame.”

“You would have found difficulty in exonerating him, you know.”

“Oh, well, it never came to that.”

“What happened when the owners came back and found the car gone?”

“I have no idea. I had no intention of being on the spot and answering questions. I saw my son off and then I walked round to Mrs. Purse, who keeps her own hens, and bought my usual dozen of fresh eggs. She likes a gossip, so I stayed an hour or so, by the end of which time I thought the car people would have come and gone.”

“Car people?”

“I said there were two, didn’t I? A man and a woman, and no better than they should be. *They* weren’t the sort to be visiting the poet’s grave! Don’t you tell *me*! If they went into the churchyard, it wasn’t to look at graves. You could see what *they’d* come for. It was written all over the pair of them. I suppose the car—if you can call a scrap-heap of old iron a car—wasn’t roomy enough for immorality.”

“And you never saw them again?”

“Nor heard of them, thank goodness.”

“Do you not read the newspapers?”

“Oh, if you mean do I know the car was found in London, yes, I do know that. The constable came round and told me. I complained to him, as I told you, thinking it would cover my son’s tracks.”

Dame Beatrice finished her tea, declined a second cup and, to cover her own tracks, walked across to the churchyard to look for the poet's grave. She found it in a far corner, ornately headstoned, and the view from it was over fields and woods and away towards the stone quarries where Gorinsky's body had been found. The quarries were her next objective. She returned to the lych-gate to find George loitering there.

"If you will be good enough to wait a moment, madam," he said, "I will bring the car along."

"Thank you, George, but I think I will walk with you to where you have left it. There are reasons why I should not wish to encounter Mrs. Spreadapple again just at present, although I may have to talk to her later on."

The stone-quarries seemed to belong to a dead world. Dame Beatrice knew from Toby which direction to take upon leaving the village. There was a long U-shaped road which left the village street and joined the main road at some woods. Then these changed to open heathland. Halfway across this the quarries were scattered along a rough lane which ran eastwards on the brow of a low ridge of limestone until it met another main road which led ultimately to Poole.

"George," said Dame Beatrice, "if you wanted to get to Poole from the *Swan Revived,* would you take this route?"

"No, madam. There is a far better road, and a much shorter one, by going to Morchester, which is in the opposite direction to the one we took to get to the village just now."

"As I thought. The object of the motorist who found Mr. Gorinsky's body was not to get to Poole, therefore, but, I think, to Weymouth. His only object in turning into this lane was for the reason we have been told. Well, I think we may infer from that that the nearest secluded spot would have suited his purpose, and that his discovery of the body was quite as inadvertent as he claims. Fortunately, the excavations seem to occupy only one side of the lane, so we may hazard a guess as to which of the quarries held the body."

"Is it important to pin-point one in particular of these workings, madam?"

"Not important, no. It can make no real difference, since the police will have had it pointed out to them."

“Then, if you would care to remain in the car, madam, the terrain being rough in the extreme, I will reconnoitre. It would probably be the deepest of the workings, if the object was to conceal the body, would it not?”

“Or one which has been abandoned long enough for rough vegetation to have taken root in it, thus affording a modicum of cover for the cadaver. I can see why they chose this neighbourhood, George. I imagine that these workings have been abandoned for many years.”

George left his employer in the car and picked his way among the moon-dead heaps of stone and rubble. Some of the quarries were less than ten feet deep, but there was one by the side of which two right-angled roughly-built freestone walls had been erected, apparently to indicate that it was privately owned. Here the excavation went considerably deeper and there were stunted bushes clinging to the sides. One of these walls, George decided, would have given the motorist the necessary cover, and from either of them it was possible to glance into the quarry.

“I may have found the hole the murderers used, madam. Should you wish to examine it?”

“No, George, there is no necessity. Would you think that two people could have managed to convey a dead body to it? It is not so very near the side of the road.”

“They would have to watch their step, madam, the ground being very rough, but I don’t see why two persons could not have carried a body that far and tipped it over the edge, or even one man, if he was young and strong, could have done it.”

“I wonder why they went into the churchyard after they had left the car on Mrs. Spreadapple’s seemingly sacred verge, and what they thought when they found it had gone?”

“You think they had already dumped the body before they ever went to the village, do you, madam?”

“It is not possible to say.” She recounted what Mrs. Spreadapple had told her.

“Then I don’t see what their object could have been in going to the village at all, madam. I should have thought, if they’d got rid of the body, they would return immediately to the inn.”

“Yes,” said Dame Beatrice, thoughtfully. “I think you have a point there, George. It does seem likely—*if* they had got rid of the body.”

“I was endeavouring to put myself in the place of the criminals, madam. We have to assume, I take it, that the unfortunate gentleman met his death at the *Swan Revived*.”

“I do not think there can be very much doubt about that, George.”

“Person or persons, therefore, were left with the problem of disposing of the body.”

“Quite so.”

“Is it certain that the body was put into the quarry *before* the main party left the inn, madam?”

“You intrigue me, George. Pray continue.”

“Had I been the guilty person, madam, I should have left the body concealed at the inn, vacated the premises and left the landlord to find it. I am a student of the literature of crime, madam, and it has always seemed to me that the mistake many murderers make is in trying to get rid of the body. Suppose, for the sake of argument, this person did not make that mistake. The party of which he is a member leaves the inn in some haste and drives to London in a car whose number plates have been changed. They leave a second car—the one seen by Mrs. Spreadapple—and the landlord finds it after they have gone. We will assume that this car had been left unlocked and that the body had been put into the boot, or otherwise concealed in the car. This is supposition only, and does not really affect my argument. All I am assuming is that the body was left at the inn together with the car which was subsequently found in London.”

“By heavens, Holmes, this is wonderful!” said Dame Beatrice, in tones of genuine admiration. “It opens up a line of enquiry quite different from the one the police have envisaged, and certainly would solve some of the more difficult problems connected with the case. Pray go on.”

“Thank you, madam. The landlord, I imagine, soon finds out why the car has been left behind. Well, he has nobody to turn to but his wife, so he is obliged to confide in her.”

“Good gracious me, George! Mrs. Spreadapple mentioned a man and a woman. I took it for granted that the woman was this mysterious friend whom no one but Smetton seems to have seen arrive at the *Swan Revived*, but, if your guess is the correct one . . .”

“Just so, madam. It would clear up the question of that particular lady, would it not?”

“Indeed it would. You mean that Smetton invented her arrival at the inn to serve his own purpose. Yes, indeed, that seems extremely likely. So the man and woman who left the car opposite Mrs. Spreadapple’s cottage could have been Smetton and his wife. You suggest that Mrs. Spreadapple’s son never intended to drive the car further than the stone quarries. How he came to find that he was carrying a dead body we don’t know at present, but if your theory is correct, he must have done.”

“And dumped it in the deepest quarry he could see, madam. He probably knew the quarries, anyway, his mother living so near, and then he properly got the wind up and drove to London and abandoned the car in Yelton where the police found it. The only thing is, why would he choose Yelton, madam? The other lot were bound for Yelton, too, so perhaps my argument breaks down.”

“Not necessarily, George. Yelton had been his home before his mother was widowed and came to live in Dorset. People are creatures of habit. It could have been merely coincidence that the others were also going there.”

“That could be it, then, madam. On the way to London the young soldier could have sent his mother a telegram cautiously mentioning unforeseen circumstances, no doubt. She would guess it was something to do with the purloined car. He probably wrote to her later, explaining what the circumstances were, and telling her to keep very quiet about it, not to get herself involved.”

“Your reconstruction may or may not be correct, George, but it is certainly ingenious and would explain a great many things which have been puzzling me. I congratulate you heartily.”

“Thank you, madam.”

“Yes, there is much in what you say. I have never been able until now to see why those stone-quarries came into the picture. From what Mr. Sparowe has told us, it seems most unlikely that any of the party except Dave knew of their existence. Besides, I doubt whether the murderer, with or without an accomplice, would have thought of leaving the car outside Mrs. Spreadapple’s cottage and parked on her sacrosanct verge, but a local man like Smetton might well have known of her idiosyncrasy and decided, perhaps, to teach her a lesson by saddling her with a car containing a body, but that is a detail. I see only one difficulty. Mrs. Spreadapple saw the two people who left the car at her gate. If Smetton knew her, might not the reverse be true?”

"She may have seen only their backs, madam. She probably knew Smetton by sight, but, even if so, she had probably never seen him or his wife except behind the bar of the *Swan Revived*, and that is a very different matter from getting a look at their back view in their outdoor clothes as they walked away from her. I remember that the first time I saw the landlord of my own local in his street clothes and wearing a hat I didn't recognize him."

"You have an answer for everything, George."

"I confess to a great interest in this particular case, madam. I feel sympathy with the young fellow who had to face the magistrates. Whoever put the body in that pit, *he* didn't."

"Now how am I going to approach Smetton? I must invoke the cunning of the serpent and the wisdom of the dove. Let us return to the *Swan Revived*, or we shall be late for lunch."

"You don't suspect Mr. Smetton himself of having committed the crime, then, madam?"

"In such a case you think I should not be able to enjoy his hospitality?"

"I beg your pardon, madam. I fear I took a liberty."

"Oh, no, you did not. Besides, you are quite right. I am certain that Smetton did not kill Gorinsky. Well, here we are at the inn, so now for lunch."

George's intelligent theory posed some problems as well as solving others. For one thing, it accounted for the fact that nobody except Smetton claimed to have seen Gorinsky's woman friend. It also disposed of the difficulty Dame Beatrice had found in accepting that two of the party had left the *Swan Revived* in Maverick's little car, dumped the body, and walked nearly four miles back to the inn to rejoin the other three for the journey to London. Then there had been difficulty in deciding which of the party had driven the car to Yelton and abandoned it there, but Mrs. Spreadapple had disposed of that problem, since it was hardly likely that she would have implicated her son unless her evidence was true. Against George's reconstruction of events was the question of whether Smetton, finding the small car with Gorinsky's body, might not have disposed of the corpse himself in the manner and with the assistance which George had described. Apart from the likelihood that, far from getting rid of the body with such

secrecy and dispatch, he would have elected to telephone the police when he discovered what had been left on his premises, there was the further question of whether he would have invoked his wife's assistance in getting rid of it. So far as Dame Beatrice was aware, Mrs. Smetton was a homely, good-natured, law-abiding kind of woman and not at all the type to assist in the perpetration of dark deeds in stone quarries, even under the orders of a husband.

On the other hand, the landlord might have acted under the influence of panic. The first thing which might have occurred to him was to get the body off his premises at the earliest possible moment. He probably knew enough about the law, too, to realize that, in the event of discovery, his wife was the one person who could not be asked to testify against him. Then, too, the choice of an abandoned stone-quarry as the repository for the body indicated local knowledge, as she had already conceded, and who more likely to have local knowledge than the landlord of an inn?

Over a solitary lunch she pondered upon the best way to approach the subject with Smetton. A direct approach would be both tactless and useless, she decided. When she had concluded her simple meal she went into the saloon bar. At a quarter past two it was empty except for Smetton himself.

"I met an acquaintance of yours this morning," she said, when she had ordered a small brandy. "I went along, as a good tourist should, to the village of Heathcote Fitzprior, where, I understand, the poet William Heathcote lies buried, but before I visited the grave I had parked my car in what turned out to be the wrong place."

"Not on old Mother Spreadapple's bit of grass?" asked Smetton, grinning.

"It would appear so. She emerged, breathing fire and slaughter."

"Oh, yes, she would. But what makes you call her an acquaintance of mine? She didn't make mention of me, did she?"

Dame Beatrice ignored the last half of the question.

"I assumed that her son, if not herself, would be a customer here, as there is no other inn," she said.

"First I knew she'd got a son. What's more, she's never set foot in this house, so far as I know. Probably T.T., with *her* sort of attitude towards other folks."

"Oh, you know of her rabid dislike of having motorists park their cars outside her gate, I see."

“Everybody all round knows about that. A proper joke, that is. Personally, I’ve never set eyes on the silly old battleaxe. Wouldn’t know her if I met her in the street.”

“She seems to have set eyes on *you*. You were walking with your wife, apparently, when she saw you.”

“Where was this, then? And when would it have been?”

“Why, in the village of Heathcote Fitzprior itself, to be sure, and I think it might have been sometime last month, perhaps. You and Mrs. Smetton were walking away from her cottage towards the churchyard, I think she said.”

“She was talking through her hat, Dame Beatrice. I don’t know when we were last in Heathcote Fitzprior. Dora! Dora! Come here a minute, will you, love?”

Mrs. Smetton emerged from the room behind the bar.

“What is it now?” she said. “I’m in the middle of washing-up.”

“Nothing much, love. That old mischief-maker Mother Spreadapple told Dame Beatrice she saw us in the village last month.”

“She must have been mistaken,” said Mrs. Smetton flatly. “What would we want in the village? Do all my shopping in Morchester. There’s nothing in the village except that one little general store with the post-office counter at the back.”

“I thought perhaps you bought your eggs from Mrs. Purse, who, I’m told, keeps her own hens,” said Dame Beatrice.

“Yes, and some of her so-called fresh eggs are more than a week old,” said Mrs. Smetton. “I tried her once, but I’ve never set foot in the village since, and that was two years ago.”

Dame Beatrice retired without the honours of war, but convinced that the couple were lying.

Meanwhile Laura and Toby, bound for Leeds, had come to amicable agreement on the matter of driving the car. Laura liked to take the wheel and Toby was agreeable to having someone else do the work and accept responsibility, so they took Laura’s little car and full advantage of Ml, which they joined a few miles short of Northampton, and did the journey in one day.

Their errand, however, yielded no fresh information concerning the Maverick party and no clue at all to the identity of Gorinsky’s murderer.

“If they *do* know anything more, they ain’t talking,” said Toby disgustedly, as he and Laura left the Leeds hotel.

“Of course, the biggest mystery, apart from who done it, is no concern of theirs,” said Laura, “and they seemed surprised I mentioned it.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, the three men who stayed here that night and went off without Dave and the old sparring-partner seem to have had the boxing set-up they brought with them all unloaded and taken upstairs, and then loaded up again on the following morning. It seems so senseless, doesn’t it? I wonder why they went to all that trouble just for one night? That’s what Sebastian wondered, too.”

“Perhaps they were afraid of getting the stuff pinched from the car.”

“Could be that, I suppose, but who would want to steal posts and ropes and things? Oh, well, let’s go back and report nothing doing at this end except a confirmation of what you found out when you were in Leeds before.”

“Well, that’s better than contradiction of what I found out,” said Toby, “isn’t it?”

CHAPTER TWELVE

Not Golf But Croquet

"A chance may win that by mischance was lost;
The net that holds no great, takes little fish."

Robert Southwell—*Times Go By Turns*

Further reflection caused Dame Beatrice more and more to accept George's theory as approximating to the truth. On returning to the station house she telephoned her grandson in his capacity of Dave's lawyer and put the point to him.

"I realize it does nothing to clear the boy of the charge," she said, "but it suggests a new angle and explains some of the matters which, up to now, have been minor mysteries."

"No, it doesn't help with the major problem," Sebastian agreed. "I wonder whether it would be of any use for me to have a word with this Mrs. Spreadapple?"

"I doubt whether she will commit herself or her son any further. As it is, she has made the dangerous admission that her son drove away the car which, it seems, must have contained the body. I am surprised, on thinking over the conversation, that she told me as much as she did. I suppose you have learned nothing more from the boy?"

"I've had talks with him, but I don't think he knows any more. Of course, if the case goes to the Assizes, as it very well may, the charge will be manslaughter under provocation, not murder. Of that I can be certain."

"What I think you could do with advantage, if you would, is to come down here and talk to the people at the *Swan Revived*. If they can be persuaded to swear that Dave was locked in his room for that hour and three-quarters during which the murder must have been committed, it seems to me that that would give the boy a loophole through which he might escape. You might also sound the landlord about that bottle of Dubonnet. So far it has received no more than a mention, but, if it was the murder or manslaughter weapon, it has great significance. I am sure there is more to be learned concerning it. Find out where the landlord, his wife, and her cousin were, and what they were doing during that hour and three-quarters between the time Dave knocked Gorinsky down and kicked him and the

time the party of five left the inn. Oh, and you might try to break the landlord down over his story that Gorinsky and Scouse brought a woman to the inn on the previous night. I am almost certain they did nothing of the sort. Meanwhile I will make some enquiries at Morchester station, although I do not have much hope that anything will come of them. I think it unlikely, as a matter of fact, that the two men went to meet anybody at all, or even went to the station that evening. They certainly went out. Holley and Biddle can witness to that, but—"

"Why should they have given out that that's where they were going, then?"

"Your guess, as Laura would say, is as good as mine. Am I to expect you here?"

"Yes, I'll be down as early as I can. I'll get lunch on the way and hope to be with you by about half-past two unless anything crops up in the morning and holds me back."

Dame Beatrice's theory that nothing would come of her visit to Morchester station was borne out. She learned nothing whatever there except that the police had asked the same question, only to be given the same answer. This was that the last train of the day came through at half-past ten, so that anybody thinking of meeting a passenger later than that would have been obliged to keep that passenger waiting. This had not occurred, so far as the ticket-collector was aware.

Sebastian Lestrange drove up to the *Swan Revived* to interview the Smettons. They were aware of the fact that he was Dave's lawyer and he found them perfectly willing to talk. Their story, however, offered little fresh material to work on. To his mind, apart from the main puzzle, the most interesting aspect of the case concerned the woman Gorinsky and Scouse had or had not brought back to the inn, and at first he concentrated on this part of the story.

"You see," he said to the Smettons, who had no need to be in the bar during afternoon closing hours and so were being interviewed in the parlour, "a very serious charge has been brought against the two of you and it is bound to come up if Holley is sent for trial."

"A charge? Against the two of *us*?" said Mrs. Smetton sharply. "Oh, but that isn't possible! We've always been law-abiding folk. Never any trouble about the licence and always most particular about closing-time and the under-eighteens and the betting laws and not serving folks as has had

enough when they've *had* enough—I don't see what there would be to tell except wicked lies, and I don't know of no one who would want to tell lies against us and against the conducting of this house. We've always been most respectable and careful, and that I can assure you of."

"Well, it's nothing like that, as a matter of fact," said Sebastian, in his pleasantest, most conciliatory tone. "It's about Gorinsky's death. First, at the risk of being tedious, let me go over your evidence once again. Now, Mr. Smetton, at or around midnight you opened the door to Gorinsky, Scouse, and an unknown woman. Why didn't you leave the door unlocked so that they could get in without disturbing you?"

"I thought I explained about that in court, sir. What's more, I told Gorinsky I shouldn't lock up. 'Come to the side door, which is nearest for you when you've parked your car,' I said. 'I'll leave it so's you've only to turn the handle. Then if you wouldn't mind just shooting the bolt when you get inside,' I said. But no! They must come hammering on the door and fetching me out of bed."

"And you're quite sure you admitted three people, and that one of them was a woman?"

"Well, there, you see, that isn't quite exactly right. I thought as how I explained that, too."

"Oh? You *can't* swear to the woman, after all?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I can swear to *her* all right, but—not as I can see it makes any difference—I can't swear to Gorinsky."

"Really? How was that, then?"

"Simple, really. When I opened the door there was Scouse and this woman, so I says, a bit sharp like, being woke up out of my sleep, 'I left the door on the latch so's you could get in,' I says. 'You only had to turn the handle,' I says. 'I told Mr. Gorinsky special,' I says. Well, Scouse says he didn't know about it, and there was no point in me making a song and dance, as it wasn't his fault I was dragged out of bed. So I asked where was Mr. Gorinsky and Scouse said he was putting the car away and, if I'd show the young woman where she was to sleep, he'd stay and see that Gorinsky locked up."

"And did you show the young woman to her room?"

"Certainly. I just said, 'This way, miss,' and she followed me up the stairs and I opens Daffy's door and says, 'In here, miss,' and in she goes, and that's the last I ever see of her. It's a mystery to me where she could

have got to, but, what with the fight upstairs next morning and the row they made hustling young Holley up to his room, and then the fussation about bringing Gorinsky round, and then them all going off so sudden, the young woman kind of slipped my mind till later on."

"But what was that about us being spoke against, sir?" asked Mrs. Smetton anxiously.

"Well, you'll have a perfect answer to it, no doubt, but we have a witness who thinks she saw you both in Heathcote Fitzprior village walking away from the car which was parked on Mrs. Spreadapple's verge." Sebastian had been given George's theory by his grandmother.

"Which she couldn't have done," said Smetton flatly.

"I know," said the young lawyer soothingly, "but how can you prove it?"

"Saw both of us, she says?"

"Both of you, yes."

"Well, there's your proof, sir. Mother and me can't never both be away from the bar during opening hours, not both of us at the same time."

"What about Miss Daffy?"

"Leave Daffy in charge of the bar? She'd have a fit, and so would we. Besides, she'd gone to Mrs. Purse for eggs, and that can be proved, too and all, if anybody want to make anything of it."

"Yes, of course. Well, thank you very much. It seems as though we can dispose of this witness without bringing her into court."

"The busy-bodying nosy old faggot!" exclaimed Mrs. Smetton. "I'd like to give her the rough end of my tongue, trying to get honest folks into trouble with her lying, snaky ways."

"Now, now, mother! Happen it was a genuine mistake," said Smetton soothingly.

"Oh, I'm sure it was," said Sebastian. "Better not make an issue of it, since it can all be cleared up so easily. By the way, Mr. Smetton, did this young woman of Gorinsky's have any luggage with her?"

"Luggage? Oh, yes, sir. She had a couple of suitcases. I carried them up the stairs for her."

"They'd gone, of course, next day?"

"Oh, yes, they'd gone, the same as *she* had. Leastways, they wasn't in Daffy's room, where I put 'em the night before."

“So there it is,” said Sebastian to his grandmother on his return to the station house. “I’m beginning to believe in the young woman. He is very certain about having seen her, and I think he’s unshakeable, now he’s not in court.”

“Yes,” said Dame Beatrice, eyeing her grandson. “What is more, Miss Daffy was sent to buy eggs from a woman whose eggs Mrs. Smetton affects to despise. Added to that, there was this mysterious young woman who doesn’t seem to have uttered a word; there were her two suitcases; there was Scouse with her at the side door of the inn—”

“Well?”

“The landlord says he did not see Gorinsky that night, but he saw the woman. He saw Gorinsky next morning, but the woman had disappeared, and neither of them came down to breakfast. Can we deduce anything from this slightly suggestive evidence?”

“But what would be the point of Gorinsky’s disguising himself as a woman? That’s what you’re getting at, I imagine.”

“Well, it *is* a point which needs clearing up. Did you put my other questions to Smetton?”

“You mean about the boy having been locked in his room? I don’t see how they can swear to that, you know. I mean, he may have been (he probably was), but the Smettons’ evidence for it isn’t viable.”

“You think not? You may be right. What about the bottle of Dubonnet?”

“Sorry. I forgot about that. I can’t think it’s of any importance, anyway, because any one of them could have picked it up and swung it.”

“Maybe, but it intrigues me.”

“Don’t you think it might be dangerous to my client to pursue the bottle *motif*? I mean, what more likely, from the point of view of a jury, than that an East End boy in a temper swung a bottle and crushed a skull? It’s not as though Dave is a puny little weakling, you know. Get him, with his thews and sinews, behind a heavy bottle, and you’ve got something in the nature of a sledge hammer, as the prosecution will be quick enough to point out. It isn’t disputed that he knocked his man down and kicked him. What more natural than that, in his admittedly berserk state, he finished him off? *I* don’t believe he did, but a jury might.”

“Well, how did one of them get hold of the bottle? For my own information I shall pursue the matter. I need to see the Smettons again, in

any case. There is something else which, so far, does not seem to have been thought of."

"What's that?"

"Nothing important, most probably, but, to use one of Laura's most well-worn quotations, we must leave no stone unturned, no avenue unexplored. The party of five left in one car, which they filled. Assuming that they had at least one suitcase each, these would have accounted for all the space in the boot, even in a large car. What means were employed, therefore, to transport a boxing platform, four ring-posts, a quantity of stout rope, a punching bag, a punching ball, several pairs of boxing gloves, protective head and body gear, skipping ropes . . ."

"I suppose they sent for them. It would be easy enough. Anyway, I'm sure it's unimportant, and I can't even see that it's interesting. Some removals van must have been told to load them up and take them straight to Yorkshire. You said Sparowe told you they were unloaded at an hotel in Leeds. Come to that, only ropes and ring-posts seem to have been specifically mentioned."

"Nothing has been said about a furniture van, but perhaps, as you say, it is a thing of no importance."

She changed this opinion again after she had seen Toby and Laura and had had another interview with Mrs. Smetton. The travellers returned to the station house to make their sterile report and Laura, who still scented a mystery, emphasized the fact that, even for an overnight stay, the boxing gear had all been unloaded from the car.

"From the *car*? Are you sure?" asked Dame Beatrice.

"Certain," replied Laura emphatically. "When Toby first told us his tale I was struck by the fact that they went to all the trouble of having the stuff taken upstairs only to have it all brought down again in the morning. It seemed so idiotic that I queried it at the hotel, but the receptionist and the porter remained firm. It had been unloaded from the boot of the car and was put back there on the following morning directly after breakfast."

"Then they couldn't have taken anything like all of it," said Toby. "Any good asking the Smettons whether anything was left behind?"

"I think it might be," said Dame Beatrice, "if only as a matter of interest." She went across to the inn next day after Laura and Toby (who had been offered a bed there during Dame Beatrice's tenancy of the station) had gone to the Stone House in Hampshire, and was invited into the parlour

by an indignant Mrs. Smetton who obviously had been brooding on her wrongs.

"That lawyer said somebody went to the police and said she saw Mr. Smetton and me in Heathcote Fitzprior the morning that lot left for London," she said. "*They couldn't* have done, Dame Beatrice. We wasn't there."

"It's easy to be mistaken, I suppose. I quite see that, and it seems that all the person saw was the back view of a man and a woman who were walking away from a parked car."

"But why should they say it was us? That's what *I'd* like to know. It might get us to lose our licence. What's going to be the outcome, if it's thought we left the bar unattended during hours?"

"Licensing hours, you mean?"

'That's right. We have to be open for custom every day of the year for the hours that's laid down, and there's no getting away from it."

"You are allowed help, I suppose?"

"And where do we get that?"

"Well, there is your cousin, isn't there?"

"That's what the young lawyer fellow said. Nice boy, but he's got a lot to learn. Put Daffy in charge of the bar? She'd have a fit, as I told him. She doesn't know anything about the prices, for one thing, and she doesn't know lager from light ale. She'd spend all her time reading the labels on the bottles while the customers got blue in the face swearing."

"Ah, yes, the bottles," said Dame Beatrice. "Did you ever find the missing bottle of Dubonnet?"

"No, we never have, and if the police are right—they keep on coming and pestering us, you know—we never shan't. Got somebody's fingerprints on it, if you ask *me*, and fingerprints catches murderers, so I hear."

"You may well be right. I suppose the police are still searching for the bottle, then?"

"Turned the place inside out and upside down, they have. I wish they'd give over. They'll never find out nothing more here. First I knew we'd got any bottles of Dubonnet, but Mr. Smetton sees to all the stock."

"When did the van come to take away all the gear? I understood that your big room on the first floor was used as a gymnasium."

"Van? There hasn't been no van. They went off like that, all in a hurry, and left all that boxing stuff behind. It's all up there, just as it was. Come on

up and I'll show you. I'd like to get rid of it, but I don't know who I could ask to take it away. It isn't ours, you see."

"By the way," said Dame Beatrice, as they mounted the stairs, "I suppose it's quite certain that young Dave Holley was locked in his room after he had knocked down Mr. Gorinsky, and that he wasn't released until the party was ready to set off for London?"

"As to that, I couldn't say for sure. All I know is I saw that ignorant man they called Harry outside Dave's room and I heard him saying Dave was to cool off and behave himself or else they'd both be out of a job. Well, here's the room, just as they left it, except I keep it dusted and that, of course."

"Well, this is extremely interesting," said Dame Beatrice. "I have never seen a gymnasium equipped for boxing. This, I suppose, is what they call the ring."

"Portable," said Mrs. Smetton. "It comes in these six four-foot squares and you fix them together with these metal clamps. Then the posts socket into these slots and the ropes go through these holes and there you are. You can see the way it's fixed up."

"Ingenious." Dame Beatrice pulled up one of the corner posts an inch or two. "I wonder why they had a second lot of apparatus delivered at the hotel in Leeds, when it would surely have been cheaper to send for this?" She examined all that was there, even to the extent of unscrewing the wooden handles of the skipping ropes. "I see that the cornerposts, as well as the platform, are made in sections, and that they are of metal and are hollow. Very convenient indeed if one wanted to smuggle diamonds." She cackled. Mrs. Smetton laughed.

"Of course, they took the gloves," she said, "being items they could push into their suitcases, I suppose, but the punching ball they left behind, as you can see, and these helmet things and kind of body pieces, and their punching bag still hung in the garage until Mr. Smetton took it down, it being inconvenient there."

"I suppose they used all these things daily?"

"Well, not the punching bag, though why they didn't I don't know, except I suppose the lad used poor Harry Biddle instead."

"I suppose they left nothing else behind?"

"They didn't have nothing else to leave except their suitcases, and they certainly didn't leave *them*."

“Did any of them bring more than one, do you know?”

“No. Daffy and I done out their rooms and made the beds and there was never but the one suitcase in each, and, ’cepting for Gorinsky’s, they was only very small ones.”

“Why wouldn’t Gorinsky allow your husband to use his room the night the woman came here?”

“Oh, well, it wouldn’t hardly have done seeing she wasn’t his wife, would it? It would have meant her and Gorinsky sharing.”

“That wasn’t the reason he gave your husband, though, was it?”

“No. He said he couldn’t be bothered shifting his gear and didn’t want nobody else to lay their hands on it.”

“That was before he and Mr. Scouse left for the station at Morchester, of course. Did it not sound a very inadequate reason?”

“Not if you knew Gorinsky.”

“I wonder what you mean by that?”

Mrs. Smetton did not attempt to explain. She said:

“I often wonder what happened to the girl. I wish I’d set eyes on her, that I do. She come by night and she’d gone by morning, and then for there to be all that to-do and Mr. Gorinsky to be found dead like that and Mr. Smetton to have to go and look at his body. It’s not what I’ve been accustomed to, Dame Beatrice, and that’s a fact.”

“The young woman left without a word to you, and took her suitcases with her, and did not wait for breakfast? Yes, it is most strange. I suppose Gorinsky drove her to the station, and that is why he did not breakfast with the others.”

“Ah, well, let’s hope we’ve seen the end of the lot of them. I’m sorry for that boy, though. If he done it, he done it in a fit of temper, but they’re bound to make allowance for that, Dame Beatrice, ain’t they?”

“Now, about the bottles of Dubonnet. Where were they kept?”

“One on the shelf in the bar and two down the cellar, I suppose.”

“And which one disappeared and was unaccounted for?”

“Why, one of those in the cellar. We’d have missed the other one sooner, so Mr. Smetton said.”

“Could your guests get into the cellar?”

“Well, there’s no lock on the flap as leads down from behind the bar, but I couldn’t say whether any of ’em ever went down there, I’m sure. I should have thought Mr. Smetton would have knowed, if they did.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Innocents Day

"Old Satan's mad and I am glad—O send one angel down!
He missed the soul he thought he had—O send one angel down!"

Anon.—*Negro Spiritual*

"You see," said Dame Beatrice to a worried C.I.D. inspector, "it is so extraordinary that the party should have left all that quite expensive equipment at the *Swan Revived* and obtained some new items of the same sort somewhere and at some time between leaving the inn and arriving at their hotel in Leeds. Then there is the matter of Gorinsky's forged signature in the hotel register."

"They claim he asked Smith, that is Gracechurchstreet, to sign in for him. I've had another go at them and done my best to turn them inside out, but I can't get any further. Gracechurchstreet even admits that he wrote the note that seems to have started all the trouble. Says he didn't want the boy to become friendly with Mr. Sparowe because he had found out that Mr. Sparowe was a more than useful amateur and the next thing would be not only the training spins but some sparring, and the boy could get hurt and his looks spoilt for filming. I've also seen Mr. Sparowe and he allows that he did spar with the boy, but claims it was only once. He also told me that he gave the lad a few tips."

"Of which, in his attack on Gorinsky, Holley seems to have made good use," commented Dame Beatrice. "But, in view of the medical opinion, Inspector, together with the apparently unassailable evidence that the boy was locked in his room until the party left the inn, you cannot seriously believe that Dave Holley killed Gorinsky, can you?"

"Somebody did, ma'am, and there's no evidence of any other quarrel."

"I suppose you've never considered the theory that the boxing set-up and Gracechurchstreet's manoeuvres as an impresario were a cloak for something quite different?"

"What sort of something, ma'am? You see, I think there's a conspiracy to protect this boy. What if he wasn't locked in his room until *after* he'd swung that bottle and done for Gorinsky? None of them want the lad jugged for manslaughter, let alone murder. In their different ways they've all got a

vested interest in him. If he goes to gaol and therefore out of the picture, Scouse and Biddle are out of a job and Gracechurchstreet and Maverick (to give them their trade names) lose this remarkably fine-looking young fellow that they want for their film. Doesn't it make sense that they're all in a conspiracy to cover up for him?"

"It is the young woman who bothers me, Inspector."

"Well, yes, that part of it does seem a bit queer. I mean, she must have come to the inn, else why should the landlord, who had nothing to gain or lose either way, say that he'd let her in that night?"

"Doesn't it seem to you rather odd that it was Scouse who escorted her into the inn and Gorinsky who put away the car? As she was supposed to be Gorinsky's friend, and as Scouse was in Gorinsky's employment, wouldn't you have thought it more likely that Gorinsky would have escorted the woman to the inn door and left Scouse to put the car away?"

"Well, if you put it like that, ma'am, I could agree, but folks don't always do things the way you'd expect, do they?"

"No, that is true, of course. You did note that nobody seems to have heard the woman utter one single word? That, taken together with the way that, having appeared at the inn at some hour close to midnight, she seems to have left it again at some time before breakfast and, at that, nobody either saw or heard her go, makes me wonder whether there ever was a young woman at the inn at all."

"I take your point, and I agree it does seem strange, but why should the landlord lie about it, ma'am?"

"Because he may genuinely believe he admitted a woman that night. I don't think he did anything of the kind. I think he may have admitted Gorinsky disguised as a woman, and, in that case, I think Scouse had already put away the car before they knocked up the landlord. And that's another thing. If you question the landlord about it, he will still contend that he had arranged to leave the side door on the latch so that there would be no need to wake him or his wife if the two men came back late."

"Then why *should* they have knocked him up, ma'am?"

"I think Gorinsky may have wanted a witness to the fact that a woman had arrived at the inn that night, and had brought two suitcases with her."

"But the others all denied it, so what was the good of one witness against five?"

“The five (and they include Holley, who would hardly have been taken into their confidence if, as I believe, they were planning something illegal) did not contradict the landlord until after Gorinsky was dead. As I see it (and, of course, I may be totally wrong) Gorinsky and Scouse did go to meet someone that night, but it was not at Morchester station, and I would risk a guess that the person they went to meet was not a woman.”

“You’ve got something definite in mind, ma’am, and I know you’ve had wide experience of these cases. Would you care to tell me what you’re really thinking?”

“I should be interested to find out what was in the two suitcases which the so-called woman brought with her and which the landlord seems to have carried up the stairs. Following on that, and believing, as I do, that no woman was involved, I should like to know why Gorinsky needed to have the use of an extra room that night.”

“You mean the room the cousin was turned out of? Well, if you’re right (which, with all respect, I don’t accept at present), it does seem there’s something behind all this that we ought to investigate. Unfortunately, the man who could explain it all is dead.”

“Yes, but his enemies or confederates, whichever they were, are not. What do you know about the man who calls himself Gracechurchstreet? What is Maverick’s reputation in his native Ireland? How did they get in touch with Gorinsky? How did Gorinsky fall in with Scouse and Biddle? What gave Gorinsky the idea that young Holley would train to become a professional boxer? Mr. Sparowe, who has no axe to grind in the matter, says that the lad is inept and unskilled in the art. Gracechurchstreet may have needed him for a film because of his good looks, but Gorinsky can never have picked him out because of his potentialities as a prize-fighter.”

“Well, as I say, ma’am, I’m not convinced you’ve got the right pig by the ear, but you *have* suggested some fresh ideas and lines of approach, and I’m obliged to you because, on present evidence, we’re not going to get that boy convicted.”

“Well, I hope you are not. The lad is hotheaded, unlettered, and foolish, and he may be capable of murder, but—”

“Funny you should say that, ma’am.”

“Why?”

“I’m not at liberty to say.”

“Oh,” said Dame Beatrice, “so *that’s* why he is alarmed at the sight of woods and groups of trees! I thought it must be something of the sort.”

“Now, ma’am, you mustn’t try to pump me,” said the inspector amiably, “but if a nod is as good as a wink, you’re welcome. The lad was under the age when, according to the law, he could commit a crime. I’ll tell you that much, but I can’t say any more.”

“No, but *he* can. I shall use my authority as psychiatric adviser to the Home Office to interview him.”

“It can’t do any good, ma’am. It was all over and done with years ago. You’ll only distress the lad, I would think, and to no purpose. Still, if you choose to make it an official visit, of course I can’t stop you.”

“I’m glad of that, Inspector.”

Dave eyed his fantastic visitor with obvious apprehension.

“I don’t want no tracks,” he muttered, stirring uncomfortably before her sharp black eyes.

“Tracks, Mr. Holley?”

“I don’t want none. I been saved free times already, and I don’t go for no gospellers no more.”

“Ah!” said Dame Beatrice, enlightened. “That’s quite all right. I am not a gospeller and I do not peddle tracts. I am the grandmother of your lawyer and I believe I can be of some help to you in your present predicament.”

“Don’t see ’ow. Vey got me where vey wants me, I reckon.”

“Who have?”

“Vem rozzers. Don’t know right from wrong, so long as vey can get you sent up. Vat’s all vey cares abaht.”

“I think you do them an injustice. The fact that the magistrates have remanded you again must mean that the facts are not clear and, until the facts are clear, nobody is going to commit you for trial. I wish you would tell me how you came to meet Mr. Gracechurchstreet. I know how and why you bcame acquainted with Gorinsky, but I have no objection to hearing it repeated if it will assist you in your narrative.”

“What you want to know for?”

“Well, what else have the police got against you besides the suspicion that you killed Gorinsky?”

“Nuffink as I knows on.”

“You see, if all you did was to knock Gorinsky down . . .”

“I outed ’im.”

“Yes, I know, but it’s very doubtful whether that was enough to kill him.”

“Vey never said it was. Vey reckon I kicked ‘is ‘ead in and ven crahned ’im wiv a bottle.”

“It’s been proved that you did not kick his head in. As for the bottle, well, the doctor did not want to commit himself about that, you know.”

“Vere’s a bottle missin’, ain’t vere?”

Dame Beatrice began to wonder whether the boy was as brainless as Toby had led her to think.

“So long as it hasn’t your fingerprints on it when they find it, that can’t incriminate you, can it?”

“It ’*as* got me dabs on it,” sad Dave sullenly.

“You mean you stole it from Mr. Smetton’s stock?”

“No, vat I never! What you tike me for?”

“What happened, then?”

“I dunno.”

“All right, then, I will surmise.”

“No. O.K. I’ll tell you. Vey slipped it to me while I was locked up in me room, before us all wented up to Lunnon.”

“Who slipped it to you.”

“I dunno.”

“Oh, come, now, Mr. Holley! Having said so much, you can surely tell me the rest. Why haven’t you mentioned this to your lawyer?”

“Didn’t fink nuffink of it, ’til it come aht abaht the bottle. Vey unlocks the door and ’Arry slides it in, and ’Arry says, ‘Come orf the boil, cockie, and tike a swig of vis. It’ll do you good.’ ”

“So you took his advice?”

“Ah. Vere was some piper rahnd the top and a stopper as you can pull aht, so I ahts it and takes a swig, and ven I ’ears ’em lock the door again.”

“Did you like the Dubonnet?”

“Not much. Funny kind of taste. Made me feel as if I’d frow up if I took much more, so I never.”

“And where is the bottle now?”

“I dunno.”

“I mean, what did you do with it?”

“Can’t remember.”

“Your room was one of the attics. Had it a window that you could look out of?”

“Ah.”

“And did you look out of it?”

“Wasn’t much else to do, was vere?”

“Could you see the road?”

“Ah.”

“Both ways?”

“Sure.”

“And what did you see while you were looking out?”

“I’ll tell you what I *didn’t* see,” said Dave. “I never see Gorinsky drive off in vat little car, like vey told the beaks, and I never see no ambulance come to tike ’im to the ’orspital, like vey told *me*.”

“Are you sure of that?”

“’Course I’m sure.”

“But you weren’t looking out of the window all the time, were you?”

“No, but I got ears, ain’t I? I was listenin’ when I weren’t lookin’, on account I fought Gorinsky might send for the rozzers. ’E was a mean old skunk and I’d ’it ’im and kicked ’im, see, and you can get into trouble for vat unless you’re a toff. *Vey* can do wot vey likes, but it’s different for us.”

“I think that is largely a misconception, but we need not debate the matter. Have you told your lawyer that no car left the inn while you were incarcerated?”

“Locked up, you mean? No, I never. The uvvers vey all says different, so who’s goin’ to believe what *I* says?”

“I am prepared to do so, and for reasons of my own. Tell me, Mr. Holley, did any of the attic windows overlook the landlord’s garage or the parking space at the inn?”

“No, vey all looked aht on the road.”

“I see. Why are you afraid of woods and groups of trees?”

“You better ask vem rozzers. *Vey* knows. Scouse told me vey did. ‘Vey knows you was too young to be prosecuted, else you’d be in Borstal,’ ’e told me, ‘but you done it, and you knoo what you was a-doin’ of,’ ’e said. So vey’ll ’old it against me, see? I knows vey will.”

“How old were you when you did whatever it was?”

“Goin’ on eight, so vey couldn’t do nuffink to me ven, see, but vey will nah. Vey’ll ’old it against me, and it don’t gimme no chance, see?”

“I am still not clear what you did, but of one thing I am certain. A crime committed by you at the age you say you were, cannot possibly be held against you now. I suppose you think the police hope to extort a confession from you on the strength of a report from Scouse, but I can assure you that they would never dare to exceed their duty to such an extent, and I doubt very much whether Scouse has mentioned the matter to them. He would get very short shrift, I imagine, if he did. Officially, you see, whatever it was you did was never recorded as a crime and could not possibly be used in evidence.”

“It were a sin, vough, weren’t it?”

“Is that why you caused yourself to be ‘saved’ three times?” She cackled and, for the first time, Dave grinned. “Well, what did you actually do?”

“Well, it was vis way, see? We goes on a Sunday School treat, see? And vey takes us be train out in the country, and we ’aves our grub on a sort of a common, see, wiv pine trees and ’evver and vat. Ven vey starts us in playin’ games wiv a bat and ball and all chasin’ abaht, but us little uns, well, we gets cheesed off, see, ’cos it were too bleedin’ ’ot and us wasn’t gittin’ nuffink of the gime, on’y the big uns, see, so me and a coupla kids, we takes it on the lam and gets in a sort of a wood, and ven we comes to a fence, so we climbs it, and ven we climbs the trees and ven an old bloke come along, see, and ’ollers at us to come on dahn, so we frows bits of stick at ’im, see, and ven I loses me grip and I falls, and when I gets up ’e come arter me, see, so I scarpers, and just when he comes to grab ’old of me ’e trips over a bit of a tree-trunk, like it might be a dirty great log, see, and I’m scared of ’im, see, cos ’e got a dirty great stick in ‘is ’and, and vere’s a big stone, see, so I lays a-holt of it and as ’e’s alayin’ vere I goes kind of crazy, I reckon, so I bashes ’im on the conk and vere’s a lot of blood, so I scarpers, see, but one of the big boys as was at the treat, well, ’e was in the woods wiv a skirt, see, so ’e tells on me, ’cos ’e finks I’ll tell on ’im and the gal what vey was up to, but I doesn’t, and it turns aht the old bloke conks before vey can get ’im to the ’orspital, so vere I am, see, but vey can’t charge me on account I’m too young, but vey’ll remember it against me, vat’s what, see?”

“Well, I am sure you are mistaken, but let us go back to a previous point. I asked how you became acquainted with Mr. Gracechurchstreet.”

“Him and Mr. Maverick teamed up wiv Gorinsky, vat’s ’ow.”

“Before you went into training at the *Swan Revived*?”

“Vat’s what I dunno.”

“Why don’t you? How long had you been in training with Gorinsky before you met the other two?”

“I dunno nuffink abaht it.”

“Well, I think I do. Let me tell you my thoughts, and perhaps they will assist your memory. I think you met Mr. Gracechurchstreet and Mr. Maverick before you met Mr. Gorinsky.”

“‘Ow d’yer know vat?”

“At the risk of hurting your feelings, I must suggest that you are not really much of a boxer, are you?”

“Vat’s as may be.”

“Quite. I think Mr. Gracechurchstreet and Mr. Maverick wanted a good-looking young man to take part in a film they were planning. I *know* that they attended performances of amateur dramatic societies to see whether there were any likely prospects, and I see no reason why they should not also have made a round of boys’ clubs.”

“You’re guessin’, ain’t you?”

“Not altogether. I know, for example, that they got in touch with Mr. Sparowe on the strength of his having written the story they intended to use as the basis of their film, and I know that one of them—Mr. Maverick, I think—attended a performance of a play by Mr. Sparowe.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“That much appears to be fact.” She fixed her sharp black eyes upon the boy and leered kindly at him. Dave flinched.

“Oh, all right, ven, I’ll tell yer,” he said. “I *did* spot Mr. Maverick and Mr. Gracechurchstreet dahn at the club one night. Vey watched me box, and ven vey comes up and speaks to me and arsts me a lot of questions about where I works and all vat. Next fing I knows, vere’s vis competition, see, and vat’s when Mr. Gorinsky comes into the dressin’ room and puts it up to me to turn pro. Well, I’d ’ad a bit of a toss-up wiv me dad, so I finks it’ll spite the old man if I goes off and leaves ’im flat, me workin’ for ’im, see, and it bein’ on account of me wages, what wasn’t no more van flippin’ pocket-money what he paid me, so I agrees to go wiv Mr. Gorinsky, but, of course, I never knoo I was goin’ out into the bleedin’ country for me trainin’, else I never would of signed on, nor I didn’t know, ’til vey turned

up at the pub, vat Mr. Gracechurchstreet and Mr. Maverick was all in it, too."

"Well, that appears to be a reasonable statement, Mr. Holley," said Dame Beatrice briskly, "and I thank you for it. It now remains to establish what the connection was between Mr. Gracechurchstreet and Mr. Gorinsky prior to their appearance on your ill-starred scene. Once I know that, why, then, as my secretary would say, I think we shall be home and dry."

"You means you can git me orf?"

"I see little reason to doubt it. You will have to make another appearance in court, but that, I think, should be the end of your present difficulties, unless (and this you must be prepared for) the police ask for a further remand in custody. Do not allow this to disturb and alarm you. It will simply mean that your lawyer and I need a little more time to pursue our own enquiries, which will be independent of, but, I hope, complementary to, those envisaged by the police, especially when they are made conversant with my theories. Do you understand me?"

"I dunno. I ain't got to git windy if, when I sees the beaks, vey puts me back 'ere in the nick, but you finks I won't 'ave to fice the judge. Is vat it?"

"Your intelligence has been sadly underrated, Mr. Holley, and I shall say so to all concerned. So now, a stout heart and an optimistic outlook will be the best friends you can have, except, of course, for my grandson and myself, and the chivalrous and kindly Mr. Sparowe."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Tobias and the Angels

"And I in such a poverty of grace
That I shall think it a most plenteous crop
To glean the broken ears after the man
That the main harvest reaps."

William Shakespeare—*As You Like It*

"Poor old Dave!" said Toby. "So that accounts for his 'foby.' I suppose you realized from the beginning that something of the sort was the explanation?"

"The fact that it was woods and groups of trees and not open spaces which distressed him seemed to offer scope for investigation."

"Will he be all right now?"

"Judging from his irreligious grin after he had informed me that he had been 'saved' three times, I do not think psychiatric treatment will be necessary. This trouble he is in may prove to be a blessing in disguise, since, without it, he might never have been able to bring his mental conflict into the open."

"Is there anything I can do to help him?—in a practical way, I mean."

"There is one thing, but it may not be to your taste."

"It isn't really to my taste to write articles for my aunt's paper, you know, so please don't worry. I'm well schooled."

"This is something rather different, but it does concern women."

"Oh, Lord! You're not going to ask me to start chasing this mysterious damsel whom Gorinsky introduced into the *Swan Revived* the night before he was murdered, are you?"

"I am not unrealistic."

"How do you mean?"

"Be discreet enough not to repeat this, but I am still not at all convinced that the girl exists."

"But I thought Smetton said . . ."

"Mr. Smetton is in an unenviably tight place, I fear. He has enmeshed himself."

“Smetton? But I should have thought a more law-abiding citizen never existed.”

“I know. I am afraid it is a case of, ‘Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive.’ ”

“Deceive whom? About what?”

“The police, about what happened to Gorinsky’s body.”

“You can’t mean *Smetton* murdered him? I’ll never believe that!”

“You do not need to strain the limits of your credulity. I am convinced that Smetton did not kill Gorinsky, but I am equally convinced that he took the body to Heathcote Fitzprior.”

“But why should he do as daft a thing as that?”

“We must remember that, for various reasons, his mind was in a turmoil when he did it. There had been the quarrel between Holley and Gorinsky, at the conclusion of which he had had Maverick leaping down the stairs at him and calling for brandy; then he had heard the very considerable noise (I take it) of Holley being hustled up to the attics and locked in; then he had received the news that the party was on the point of most unexpectedly leaving the inn; then he realized (possibly not until after they had all gone off in Gorinsky’s car) that Gorinsky was not with them; then he had discovered that Maverick’s car was still at the inn and, what was most horrifying, contained Gorinsky’s dead body.”

“Enough, you think, to cause anybody to flap, and I couldn’t agree more. But how do you know all this?”

“I do not know it in the sense that I could prove it, but it is the only theory which seems at present to fit the facts.”

“Do you mean to say that it was *Smetton* who took the body to the stone quarries and tossed it in?”

“No, I do not think he went as far as that. I think his only object was to get the body off his own premises and on to those of somebody who could not possibly be implicated in the murder.”

“Who?”

“Mrs. Spreadapple. She had never been to the inn, but he knew of her by repute as a courageous, ill-tempered, managing type of woman, and he left the small car on her grass verge, knowing that she could be left to deal with it and the body.”

“And *she* took the body to the stone quarries?”

“No. Without knowing anything about the body, she told her son to drive the trespassing car there and dump it and leave the owner to find it.”

“But it was found in London.”

“I know. My theory is that her son, who was a soldier on embarkation leave, discovered, when he pulled up at the stone quarries, that the car contained more than its log-book, shall we say. Not wishing to explain to the police that he had driven the car away without its owner’s knowledge or permission, he acted with soldierly promptness and modern unscrupulous disregard for the conventions, tipped the body into a disused quarry, drove the car to Yelton, where he had once lived, and abandoned it. It was a coincidence—nothing more—that Maverick’s party was to join the travelling fair on Yelton Common, but, naturally, it helped for a time to obscure the truth about how the little car came to be abandoned outside the Yelton town hall.”

“But how do you know all this?”

“My knowledge comes from a conversation I had with George and another with Mrs. Spreadapple; my deductions, as the White Knight would say, are my own invention, but the credit for them is entirely due to my chauffeur.”

“Well, this certainly explains an awful lot, but what is it you want me to do?”

“I would like you to find out what Miss Daffy can tell you. Just allow her to talk. There is no need to question her directly. In fact, it will be as well not to do so. I do not wish you to arouse her suspicions in any way.”

“What do you expect her to tell me? I must have some sort of guide.”

“I want her impressions and recollections of the night the girl is supposed to have been brought to the inn by Gorinsky and Scouse, and I want to know all that she can tell you about the happenings on the following morning. In particular, I must find out whether she went to buy eggs in Heathcote Fitzprior from a certain Mrs. Purse. Do you know Mrs. Purse, by the way?”

“Yes. I buy my own eggs from her. She’s a vinegary old party, and the eggs are a bit hit-and-miss because her hens sometimes stray and lay away, and she doesn’t know how long the eggs have been in the hedges. However, if you tell her the number that have turned out dud, she always replaces them without question, although she grumbles that somebody must have let

the hens out. Apart from that, she's a mine of information on the Heathcote family, so that's how I really made her acquaintance."

"I hoped for something of the kind, so I want you to talk to her after (*not* before) you have gossiped with Miss Daffy."

"To check on Daffy's reminiscences?"

"And to gain any further information which may help us."

"And how will this help Dave?"

"That I cannot tell. I am dependent upon what you are able to glean. At the least I hope we can clear away some dead wood, and at the most we may obtain a clue to the identity of the murderer."

"I suppose you have your suspicions? I know I have mine."

"Indeed?"

"Oh, yes—a straight choice between Maverick and Gracechurchstreet, or the two in collusion. Poor old Harry is no murderer, Scouse wouldn't have had a motive—quite the reverse, since he was hand-in-glove with Gorinsky—and Dave, I'm positive, didn't do it."

"I wish I could be equally positive, but my bump of caution suggests that I preserve an open mind."

"You mean that you think Dave might have done it under provocation?"

"And with reason. The boy can fly into a rage, knock people down, kick them on the head . . ."

"He was only wearing boxing boots . . ."

"Fortunately for himself."

"I see. All the same, he just flew off the handle . . ."

"Yes, it seems so, does it not?—and he himself does not deny it."

"But he certainly didn't crown Gorinsky with a bottle. All the evidence is that Scouse and Harry bundled him away upstairs and locked him in as soon as they pulled him off Gorinsky."

"Yes. Have you ever been to that attic room?"

"No. I've never been higher than that big room they used as a gym."

"Could you sufficiently sink your prejudices as to find out, and tell me, whether an active lad could climb out of the window and gain the ground from that attic?"

Toby stared at her, and then agreed that he supposed he could.

"That's if the Smettons will allow me to go up there," he added.

“They will,” said Dame Beatrice, “unless they have something more to hide.”

“Anything else I can do?”

“You can ask Smetton whether either Maverick or Gracechurchstreet ever bought a full bottle of whisky from him.”

“Don’t you mean Dubonnet?”

“No, I mean whisky. I suppose he has a licence to sell liquor both on and off the premises.”

“You mean Gorinsky was slugged with a bottle of Canadian rye, and that there never was a bottle of Dubonnet involved?”

“I do not mean anything. If you relish a little exercise when you have left Mrs. Purse, you might care to scramble down into some of the stone quarries and see whether you can locate the bottle—or the fragments of it—which was handled by Holley while he was incarcerated in the attic.”

“That’s definitely an idea! I’d like to do that. I have a theory (nebulous as yet) that the bottle may have been removed from Dave’s attic after he was released and taken down to the car and placed beside the body in the smaller car.”

“And was thrown into the quarry by Mrs. Spreadapple’s son?”

“I think it possible.”

“But why should he want to get rid of the bottle?”

“Because it had blood on it, one might conjecture. But, of course, if Gorinsky was hit with a whisky bottle . . . I mean, they wouldn’t have given Dave *whisky* in the state he was in.”

“Dave’s fingerprints on a bottle which was *not* the murder weapon might give the police something to think about, I imagine.”

“So you think the intention was to frame young Dave? Well, it seems to have come off to a certain extent, doesn’t it?”

“Ah, but *only* to a certain extent.”

“I must go along to the quarries and search for that bottle, anyway. Is there anything else I can do?”

“Not unless something transpires which we do not and cannot foresee.”

“Such as?”

“If I could tell you that, it would mean that I was able to foresee it. Do not trouble about scrambling down quarries. The bottle whether of Dubonnet or whisky, will not help us now.”

"Why not?"

"If it *is* in one of the quarries it will have the soldier's fingerprints on it, and we do not want to pile Pelion on Ossa, do we? Besides, the police would have found it if it was there."

Taking his assignments in the order in which he had been given them, Toby, once again master and sole occupier of the station house, went over to the *Swan Revived* and asked for Daffy. He had gone to the side door, for the inn was closed until eleven in the morning. Mrs. Smetton opened the door to him and, instead of her usual kindly smile, a stare of deep suspicion, with (he thought) fear behind it, greeted him.

"I can't oblige, Mr. Sparowe," she said flatly, "and I'm surprised you should sir."

"Oh, I haven't come for a drink out of hours," said Toby. "I only wanted to ask Miss Daffy if she can recommend anybody for new-laid eggs. I've been getting mine from Mrs. Purse in the village, but Dame Beatrice tried her and found that hers weren't always very fresh."

"Which I could have told her if she'd asked me," said Mrs. Smetton. "Daffy shops ours in Morchester."

"I wonder whether I could have a word with her?"

"There's no occasion. She's helping Mr. Smetton clear out the garage. I can tell you where she gets the eggs. It's Bond's, a little shop in Queen Street."

"Oh, is it? Thanks very much." There seemed no reasonable excuse for lingering and, if he followed his instructions, he was not to go to Mrs. Purse until he had heard what Daffy had to tell. He returned home feeling slightly downhearted, but rallied when, from his sitting-room window, he spotted Smetton leaving the garage and walking towards the side door of the inn. This indicated that Daffy was left on her own. It seemed a good chance to talk to her, and he took it. He waited until Smetton had disappeared and then he slipped out by the door into the station yard and crossed the road out of sight of the windows of the bar.

"Hullo," he said. "How's tricks, Miss Daffy?"

"Lord!" she exclaimed. "How you startled me, Mr. Sparowe!" A gleam of amusement lit up the intelligent little grey eyes in her dough-cake face. "It isn't no use you thinking you can edge in for a drink by the side door, you know."

“I don’t want to,” said Toby. “It’s you I’ve come to see. It’s about this tiresome business of young Dave Holley. I’m worried about the kid. What sort of chance does he stand with all those rozzers breathing down his neck?”

“Well, *I* can’t help him, can I? I don’t know nothing about it.”

“I rather hoped you did. You see, what we need is an intelligent witness who’ll swear that the murder was committed that morning while Dave was locked in his room.”

“That witness couldn’t be me, Mr. Sparowe. I wasn’t on the premises at the time.”

“Oh, really? How was that, then?”

“Out shopping, as usual. The meat and cheese and veg. and eggs as that lot got through each day, well, you never would believe it! And, of course, neether Tom nor Dora, let alone me meself, us hadn’t no idea as they was a’going to take themselves off so sudden-like, so I went out to shop for them as usual.”

“So you heard nothing of the row between Dave and Gorinsky?”

“Only by hearsay, after I got back with the shopping.”

“Oh, yes, that reminds me. Mrs. Smetton told me that you’ve given up going to Mrs. Purse in the village for eggs. Why is that?”

“I have *not* give up going to Mrs. Purse, sir. It’s the only chance of a really good gossip I get in this dead and alive hole in the winter. Martha Purse is a good friend of mine and I likes her company.”

“Mrs. Smetton says her eggs aren’t fresh.”

“And a wicked libel that is, Mr. Sparowe, because she always changes the bad ‘uns. What I do, you see—only you mustn’t let on to Dora—I drives into Morchester for the most of the shopping and then, on the way back, I takes a little by-road that loops back into the village, has a cuppa tea and maybe a half-hour’s natter with Martha, and comes back to the *Swan* the same way, like as I’m coming straight back from Morchester. Dora may suspicion me, but she don’t say nothing ’cos she don’t want words and she don’t want to lose me, neether, and it suits both of our book as I stays.”

“When did she tell you you had to stop buying eggs from Mrs. Purse?”

“Oh, long enough ago.”

“Before this lot came to stay at the *Swan*?”

“Oh, ah, long before that.”

“So, on the morning of Gorinsky’s death, you were in the village with Mrs. Purse?”

“Happen I wasn’t. I had to call on the brewers in Morchester that day and it took up so much of my time that I didn’t have the chance to get to Martha’s. I got the eggs at Bond’s.”

“So what was the first you knew about Gorinsky?—about the party leaving the inn, I mean,”

“When I got back with the shopping the lot of them had gone. Then, of course, a day or two after, there was all this hullabaloo about finding the body and Tom being called upon to go and speak to it.”

“Yes, I see. Do you know Mrs. Spreadapple?”

“That lying bitch?—excusing the word, sir. That I do. I reckon everybody round about knows *her*. You don’t want to take no notice of anything she tells you. Out to make trouble, that’s all she’s out for.”

“So I’ve heard. Oh, well, what do you make the time?”

“The church clock just struck eleven. You’ll be all right now for your drink.”

“Good Lord! Your ears must be pretty sharp! I didn’t hear a thing.”

“Then you couldn’t have wanted your drink all that bad, sir. The strike was loud and clear.”

Toby slipped back to his house by the way he had come, got into his car, and drove to the village to speak to Mrs. Purse. She lived in a thatched, white-washed cottage where the village street made its U-turn to rejoin the main road. She was a wisp of a woman with iron-grey hair, an inquisitive nose and a shrewish mouth, but she had a smile, albeit a sour one, for a customer and, without a word, she packed a partitioned cardboard box with a dozen eggs. Then she said,

“I asked you particular always to bring the box back when you wanted eggs. I’m not made of boxes, am I?”

“I hope not,” said Toby, giving her a young man’s grin. “And, as a matter of fact, I didn’t come for eggs, although I’ll take them now you’ve boxed them up. I came to have a word with you.”

“I don’t reduce ’til after Pancake Day.”

“No, no, of course not. It’s really about something quite different. I believe you’re friends with Miss Daffy up at the *Swan Revived*.”

“What of it?”

“Well, would you be prepared to go into court and swear that she was here with you on the morning that chap was murdered?”

“How could I? I don’t even charge my mind with remembering which morning that was. Do you mean the no-good fellow they found in the stone quarries?”

“That’s the man. Now, look, this may be very important. You wouldn’t want to see a boy get a life-sentence for something he didn’t do, would you?”

“All the same to me. These young ’uns nowadays, you can take it for granted if they haven’t done one thing they’ve done summat else. No time for none of them, I haven’t.”

“Oh, they’re not all bad, you know—any more than your eggs,” retorted Toby, with calculated rashness. Mrs. Purse drew herself to her full height of five feet two and in awful silence removed Toby’s twelve eggs from their box and replaced them in the large wicker basket from which she had taken them. Then she pointed magisterially to the front door by which he had entered.

“I’m sorry,” said Toby, standing his ground. “It was just my joke.”

“Very funny, I’m sure! Well, you needn’t come to me no more for bad eggs. The idea! I’ve never been so insulted in my life!”

“Oh, come off it, Mrs. Purse! You don’t want to get rid of a good customer just because of a silly crack! Where’s your sense of humour?” He realized that he had overplayed his hand.

“Never had none. Nor would you, if you’d been married to Purse as long as I was. So now be off with you, if you please. There’s some as their room is preferred to their company, I’ll inform you,” said Mrs. Purse implacably.

“Just as you say,” said Toby, “but I really am very contrite. I hadn’t the slightest intention of upsetting you. Please let me have my eggs, and I’ll tell young Holley’s lawyer that Miss Daffy didn’t come into the village that morning. There’ve been funny doings up at the *Swan,* you know, and the Smettons may find themselves in Queer Street before they’re through. I wouldn’t like to see Miss Daffy implicated, but there it is! If she didn’t come into the village, she must have been elsewhere, and it’s up to the police to find out where.”

“She’d have been doing the shopping in Morchester. Used to go in every day while that party was there. Anyway, if you want to know, she *was*

in the village that day. She didn't know I seen her, but I did."

"Have you told her so?" The boat which he felt he had rocked too violently seemed to be on an even keel again.

"No, I ain't. If she chooses to come to the village and park other folks' cars on that Mrs. Spreadapple's bit of green, it's no concern of mine, although I think she might have mentioned it."

"When was this, then?" He managed to keep the excitement out of his voice.

"Why, the day you was talking about, I reckon. I told her next-door about it, us being on speaking terms again, and we worked out that's when it must have been. 'Though what she could want upsetting that nasty old Tantrums I can't make out,' I said. 'She knows what that Mrs. Spreadapple's like, as well as I do,' I said. All right, Mr. Sparowe, you can have your eggs if you want 'em, but you see you tell that lawyer the truth. Daffy *was* in the village that day, although not with me, and though I'll not see her in trouble if I can help it, I do think she might have mentioned it, I really do. After all, what are friends for, eh?"

Feeling a worm and a heel, but trying to take comfort from the fact that he was acting on Dave's behalf and that the end, he hoped, would justify the means, Toby humbly accepted his dozen eggs (feeling more ashamed of himself than ever when he noted that Mrs. Purse had picked him out the brown ones), paid for them, promised to return the box, and drove back to the church lych-gate opposite Mrs. Spreadapple's sacred roadside grass.

Suddenly he thought better of his self-abasement. Mrs. Purse's evidence coincided nearly enough with Dame Beatrice's theories. Added to that, it was unlikely that Mrs. Spreadapple would recognize his description of Daffy, as he had no idea of how she had been dressed, and she had been seen by the irate London woman walking away from her. It was unlikely that Mrs. Purse was lying on Daffy's behalf. If she had been doing so, Toby thought, she would have said, "Yes, Daffy was in the village buying eggs from me as usual" She would never have fabricated the story of the strange car left by Daffy on Mrs. Spreadapple's verge.

He drove back to the station house, left his car and walked across the road to the inn.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Prisoner's Release

"When you hear the trumpet blast,
Then you know you're home at last—
Open up them pearly gates for me!"

Anon.—*Negro Spiritual*

From behind the bar Smetton eyed Toby with sorrowful suspicion.

"You didn't ought to have tried to trip poor Daffy up, Mr. Sparowe," he said. "It wasn't kind or gentlemanly, and I must say I was rather surprised when she told me."

Toby, nettled by this speech and knowing what he felt he knew about the landlord, decided to take the bull by the horns.

"Now look here, Mr. Smetton," he said, "that's all very well, but it isn't up to you to chuck stones at other people's glasshouses."

"Meaning exactly what, sir?"

"Well, we know a good bit about your doings, you know, on the morning that Gorinsky was murdered. The party, without him, piled into his car and drove to London. How come that you didn't realize he wasn't with them?"

"Simple. They told me he'd drove off in Maverick's little bus to get to London ahead of them."

"The little bus which you afterwards found had been left in your garage with Gorinsky's body inside it."

"That's a lie!"

"Oh, no, it isn't. We've got witnesses, you know. You and Daffy drove that car away and parked it on Mrs. Spreadapple's green verge and then walked into the churchyard at Heathcote Fitzprior, Mrs. Spreadapple saw you, so you needn't bother to deny it."

"We never knew the body was inside it."

"Then why did you drive it away? Look here, Smetton, you did know the body was there. There's no point in trying to tell me the tale. I know you didn't kill the bloke, and I know you didn't throw the body into the stone-quarry where it was found, but the rest of the story fits and we can prove it,

so the best chance you have of staying out of trouble is to come clean about the whole business, if you want any help from me and Dame Beatrice."

"What do you want me to say, then?"

"Nothing, at the moment. I want to see the attic where young Dave was incarcerated while the murder was being carried out. I've got to know whether he was speaking the truth."

"About what?"

"Never you mind. You're in no position to begin asking questions. I might tell you, too, that if you show me the wrong room I shall know. Then there's another thins . . ."

"Here, half a mo., sir! One thing at a time, if you *don't* mind. You better come this way. You can see all the attics, if you wish. Think what you like. I've got nothing to hide. You can't prove I knew the body was in the car, and if that Spreadapple bitch says she saw me and Daffy in the village that morning, well, I've got a good lawyer and he'll soon make her eat her words."

As the evidence had come from Martha Purse that Daffy had been in the village and by the churchyard that morning, Toby said no more but followed the landlord up the stairs. He soon realised that it was immaterial in which of the attics Dave had been incarcerated. All three were furnished alike with a single bed and a chest of drawers, and in each the solitary small window overlooked the road. He tested the windows. They opened easily enough and were smaller replicas of those on the floor below. Dave could have climbed through any one of them without experiencing much difficulty, but there seemed no way of reaching the ground except by attempting suicide. There was neither drainpipe, tree, nor creeper within human reach.

"Satisfied, sir?" asked Smetton ironically when they had inspected each room. Toby did not reply, but on the way down the stairs he stopped at the closed door of the erstwhile gymnasium.

"What are you going to do with the junk those fellows left behind?" he asked.

"I've offered it on loan to a boys' club in Morchester, Mr. Sparowe. If Gracechurchstreet or any of them wants it back, they'll have to fetch it from there. Can't expect me to give it houseroom free, gratis and for nothing, can they now?"

“You know they seem to have bought another lot in Leeds or somewhere, do you?”

“I think Dame Beatrice mentioned it.” They went down to ground level and Smetton lifted the flap in the bar counter to allow Toby to go through to the customers’ side. “You’d like your usual, sir?” he asked.

“If there’s no ill-feeling, perhaps you’ll join me. I’m only concerned to get young Dave out of this mess he’s in, you know,” said Toby. “It’s not that I want to involve you.”

“I appreciate that, sir, but you can’t expect me to involve myself. When I looked at that car and saw Gorinsky—for I reckon I’d better come clean about that, you knowing as much as you do—well, I kind of panicked. I couldn’t get the thing off my premises quick enough, that’s what.”

“If you were only intending to leave it for Mrs. Spreadapple to find, why did you take Daffy with you?”

“Because she’d seen the body before I had. Daffy’s a good sort. She’d been to get our own car out to go for the shopping and she couldn’t, because Maverick, or one of them, had left his bunch of old iron in the way, so she come into the bar and said could I spare a minute, and when we got out in the yard she told me. Well, neither on us knew what to do, and it was her as suggested Mrs. Spreadapple. ‘She’ve been to the police about cars parked on her verge,’ Daffy says, ‘so that’s the best place to leave it, ’cos she’ll go to the police again and that’ll let them find out what’s happened,’ she says, ‘and if we both go there and nip out of the car quick and turn our back on old Mother Spreadapple’s front windows and go into the churchyard, we can take a short cut past the vicarage without coming back to the village,’ she says.”

“Taking a risk, though, wasn’t it?” asked Toby.

“Better than having the police find a dead man on my premises, we thought. However, the best laid plans of mice and men, sir, and I *still* don’t know how the body come to be in that stone-quarry, let alone how that car got itself to London.”

Toby made suitable noises expressive of equal ignorance, finished his pint and departed. He had reached the wicket gate which led to the “down” platform when he remembered that Dame Beatrice had mentioned the bottle of whisky. He returned to the inn to find the landlord pouring himself a “chaser” of gin.

“Hullo, sir! Back again?” he said uneasily.

“Just remembered something. You know that bottle of Dubonnet that went missing?”

“Hasn’t ever turned up, sir, and if that there doctor was right, it never won’t.”

“I’m not so sure. Murder will out, you know, and that usually includes the murder weapon. By the way, was Gorinsky drunk when he provoked Dave into attacking him?”

“Not that I know of. He was quite a drinking man—whisky, of course—but I never see him anything but in control of himself. I can’t speak as to what went on after they went up to their rooms, of course, but he had a bottle of Scotch sent up every second evening. Still, I never see him the worse.”

“Did the other two—Gracechurchstreet and Maverick—ever buy a bottle to take away with them?”

“Never, sir. I don’t have an off-licence for one thing, and, anyway, they could get what they wanted in Morchester, I don’t doubt. I got in the Bourbon or the Canadian rye and the Irish for ’em, but they never took no bottles away from here. Any special reason for asking, sir?”

“None—except that we’ve rather taken for granted that the bottle of Dubonnet was the murder weapon. It just occurred to me that a bottle of whisky would be even handier—a better neck to swing it by, if you see what I mean.”

Pleased at having conducted the interrogation in what he thought was a diplomatic manner, Toby went home, got out his car and drove into Morchester for lunch and then stocked up with tinned food for his larder. Home again, he had a quiet smoke, meditated a little and decided that, on the morrow, when he had written and typed his weekly article for his aunt’s paper, he would ignore Dame Beatrice’s suggestion that there was no reason for visiting the stone quarries, and would go to them to find out what he could. At about half-past three, therefore, he got out the car once more and drove past the loop of road which led to the village and pulled up at what, in the already lessening daylight, looked like the craters of the moon.

He hardly knew why he had come. He agreed with Dame Beatrice that the police, given the doctor’s unwilling statement that Gorinsky’s fatal injuries could have been caused by a blow from the base of a heavy bottle, would most certainly have returned to the quarry in which the body had been found in case the murder weapon had been tossed in as well. He

admitted to himself therefore, that there could be nothing left for an amateur sleuth to discover.

The treeless, pitted landscape was deserted. If any quarrying had been taking place that day, it was over. Then he realized that it was Sunday, and that the probability was that no work had been done there since noon on the previous day. He left the car at the roadside and picked his way between heaps of rubble and discarded broken blocks to the nearest quarry. From its depths came a loud and sepulchral groan like that of a ham actor playing the part of the ghost in Hamlet.

"Good God!" said Toby. "Who's there?"

"Hi, cocky, get me aht of 'ere. It's Chris, You got nuffink agin me, mate, so git me aht and I'll tell yer all yer warnts to know."

"Can't you climb up?" said Toby.

"No, mate. I can't move 'and or foot. Knocked me cold vey did, and chucked me dahn 'ere to peg aht."

"All right. I'll go and get help. Who are the 'they'?"

"You git me aht and I'll tell you."

Toby thought quickly. It would take time to go for help, and the voice from the depths told of exhaustion and pain. Apart from this, the only help he could count on was that of the Morchester police, for he was certain that Smetton would be loth to involve himself further. Besides, there were reasons for thinking that for Dave's sake it might be better that Toby should obtain a first-hand story from Scouse and telephone it to Dame Beatrice before it reached either the police or the newspapers, and was officially reported, diluted or enhanced. He said,

"All right, I'm coming down. Hang on a minute." He returned to the car, unrolled his tool-kit and then exchanged his jacket for an ancient anorak he kept in the boot. It had deep, useful pockets, so he slipped a fairly heavy spanner into one of them. Following Gorinsky's violent death, he was taking no chances with any of the gang, and the ape-like Scouse had never even affected to be his friend after their first encounter at the pub. Then he took up the torch he kept handy, returned to the quarry, and shone the torch into its depths.

These were not excessive, and it was obvious that the man lying in them was hardly likely to be dangerous. Toby pocketed the torch and climbed down. It was a long-abandoned hole in which plants and an occasional bush had begun to grow. Toby, moreover, in his capacity as

amateur botanist and geologist, was accustomed to rough climbing and made short work of the comparatively easy descent.

At the bottom he shone his torch and inspected the injured man.

"Well," he said, "how I'm going to get you out of this I don't quite know. If you took it very steady, do you think you could climb up?"

"I dunno, mate. Me napper's bad and I got the cramps on account vey tied me up. Couldn't you piggy-back me up?"

"Afraid not. You must go all of twelve or thirteen stone," said Toby, whose bump of humanity was not large enough to make him consider it imperative or desirable to take the ape-like creature on his back and climb with him skywards. "You take it easy, now you're found, and get some feeling into your arms and legs, and I'll get back as soon as I can."

"Don't leave me, matie! Don't leave me dahn 'ere in the dark!"

"It isn't dark yet, and it won't be dark by the time I get back."

"I can't abide bein' dahn in vis perishin' 'ole no longer. Tell you what. You let me try and climb up fust, just to see if I can do it. Ven, if I can't, p'raps you could break me fall."

"I'm not undertaking to do that. I don't want to have you squash me flat. Well, take your time and go ahead, then. If you can make it, I'll run you to the Morchester hospital in my car and get them to have a look at your head."

"Vat's the spirit, matie. Just gimme a minute to get me cramps aht, and I'll 'ave a go."

"Good show."

Five minutes later Scouse began his climb. He made laborious progress, but progress it was. He reached the lip of the quarry, heaved himself over and called feebly to Toby that he was up. He must have rolled well away from the edge, thought the young man, for he could see nothing of him, and, for no reason that he could ever explain, Toby suddenly thought of Jim Hawkins and his cat-and-mouse game with the treacherous Israel Hands. Instead of following Scouse up the easiest ascent of the quarry, therefore, he flung himself at the opposite side of it and scrambled up. As he was halfway to the top a heavy chunk of stone crashed into the side of the quarry a foot from his head.

"Of course, finding he'd missed me, he didn't stop to fight it out," said Toby. "I lost my footing when the chunk of rock crashed in, and slithered

down to the bottom with a clunk that nearly shot my spine through the top of my head. By the time I'd got myself reorganized I heard my car drive off."

"So you had to foot-slog it home," said Laura, over the telephone. "Still, you were lucky to arrive in one piece, it seems to me. Get a good night's sleep and we'll come for you first thing in the morning. Dave's case comes up again tomorrow. Had you forgotten about that?"

"Afraid I had. I didn't realize a week had gone by. What are the chances, do you think?"

"Pretty rosy, according to Sebastian Lestrange. We'll brief him about your experiences. That ought to be enough to tip the scale if it needs any extra weight. I suppose you've told the police about your car?"

"Yes, they came straight over and I put them in the picture. I expect they'll pick up Scouse."

"He rhymes with louse. I'm glad you had the rudiments of an education."

"You mean the Jim Hawkins bit? Yes. You never know when the classics mayn't come in handy. I suppose he thought I'd follow him up, and he was waiting for me. Well, be seeing you tomorrow morning."

The proceedings on the following morning, so far as Dave was concerned, were almost ludicrously short. When the preliminaries were over, the solicitor for the police was called. He and Sebastian Lestrange had been conferring in low voices before the case came on, and he addressed the Bench in manly fashion.

"If it please Your Worships, I have received some information from the police which renders it unnecessary to continue with this case. I therefore ask that the charge against the defendant be withdrawn."

The chairman of the Bench looked across the court at the impassive inspector, who rose and said,

"The police are satisfied that the defendant has been the victim of a conspiracy, Your Worship, which conspiracy we are already investigating."

"I perceive the hand of Dame Beatrice in all this," muttered Toby to Laura.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Various Bastards

"What's the matter? Have we devils here? Do you put tricks upon us with savages and men of Inde? Ha! I have not 'scaped drowning to be afeard now of your four legs; for it hath been said, As proper a man as ever went on four legs cannot make him give ground."

William Shakespeare—*The Tempest*

"So they found your car," said Laura over the telephone a day or two later.

"Yes, The theory is that Scouse blacked out, because of the injury to his head, and crashed the car into a wall."

"He's dead?"

"Oh, yes."

"I hope your car isn't a write-off?"

"Complete and utter, I'm afraid. I'm waiting to hear what my company are going to do about insurance."

"Oh, they'll pay up. It'll count that the car was stolen, and I suppose you're insured against theft. How are you managing at present?"

"Private hire from my garage in Morchester, but not more often than I can help. It's dashed expensive."

"What happened to Dave after the magistrates discharged him?"

"He breezed off with Harry Biddle."

"Oh, yes, the plug-ugly I saw him talking to when we left the court."

"I expect so. In a way it's a relief to have got rid of him, but, all the same, I was quite prepared to have him here at my place for a bit, while he decided what he wanted to do. I'd rather hoped to persuade him to go back and work for his father. It's probably the only way a bonehead like him can keep out of the hands of unscrupulous blighters like Gorinsky."

"Was his father in court?"

"I don't know. I shouldn't think so, as Dave went off with Biddle like that."

"I saw the other witnesses, Gracechurchstreet and Maverick."

"Yes. I wonder they dared appear. Surely the police can come to only one conclusion about the assault on Scouse."

“They had to come to court. They were on a witness summons. As for the attack on Scouse, well, I expect they’ve a complete and perfect alibi for that, whether they’re guilty or not.”

“One thing—Dave is in the clear about that.”

“As the police were quick to note. Besides, don’t you think a man like Scouse would have sleazy acquaintances in London who might be glad to see the back of him? I mean, Gracechurchstreet and Maverick may be completely innocent of the attack on him.”

“Not if he was blackmailing them about the murder of Gorinsky.”

“You’re so certain they *did* murder Gorinsky. Suppose they’re innocent of that, too?”

“If they are, all I can say is that their conduct in leaving the *Swan Revived* so suddenly looks very fishy.”

“There might be all sorts of explanations. They might even have believed that Gorinsky had gone to London.”

“With both cars, at that point, still in Smetton’s car park? Oh, come now, Laura! That’s not logical.”

“Well, I’ll grant they seem to bring trouble with them, so, if they come within your orbit again, you might do well to steer clear of them.”

“Oh, they’re not likely to trouble me further. I’ve no doubt they’ll turn my book into their rotten play, but that’s the only thing I’ve got to fear from them, and I’ve ceased to make heavy weather over that.”

In the event, he was not left in peace for long. When the visitors arrived he had returned from the village on foot, having posted the current contribution to his aunt’s magazine, and was in his study turning over in his mind the possibility of preparing a new and definitive biography of the family of architects surnamed Bastard. They were responsible for much of the rebuilding of Blandford Forum. The mid-eighteenth century hall of Ranston House at Shroton, the earlier Chettle House in the little village of the same name, the original design for Sir Peter Thompson’s house in Poole, and the Old Rectory (John’s House) at Spetisbury, as well as other work in Dorset, were all assigned to them, including the rectory at Charlton Marshall. The family consisted of a father and two sons. Toby had just decided that he would have plenty of material to work on, and could include some fine architectural photographs if the publishers agreed, when his thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door.

Not too pleased at having callers, he laid aside his pencil and notebook and opened up. On the threshold stood four men. They were Gracechurchstreet, Maverick, Biddle, and Dave. Toby was surprised and not at all delighted and showed it.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "And what can I do for *you* gentlemen?"

"May we come in?" asked Gracechurchstreet. "We'd like to proposition you, if we may."

"If it's anything like your last proposition, let me assure you that you're wasting your time. You're also wasting mine. I'm particularly busy at the moment planning my new book." Toby did not move from the doorway and was holding the door only half open. His aspect was as unwelcoming as his words. He found himself treated to Gracechurchstreet's death's head smile. "I really do mean it," he said. "I'm up to my eyes in research."

"Well, I'm real happy to hear you're at work again, Mr. Sparowe," said the American, with unforced cordiality. "We won't keep you more than five minutes—well, say ten. You can spare ten minutes while we put you in the picture, I guess. You'll realize what we've come about, so we need not lose time over that."

"As I haven't the slightest idea why you're here, I can't even spare ten minutes," said Toby flatly.

"Tobe," said Dave, pushing his way to the front, "Tobe, it's me chance. It's come!"

"That's right, Mr. Sparowe, sir," said Harry Biddle, in his hoarse, East London voice. "The Moonrocket's chance 'as come. Give 'im an 'earin', sir, do."

"Sorry," said Toby. "No dice. So now—good afternoon, all." He shut the door and went into the station living-room from behind whose deplorable lace curtains he could keep an eye on the platform where his visitors seemed to be holding a confabulation. There came another knock on the door. Toby opened the window. "Look," he said, "honestly, chaps, do go away and leave me in peace. I've really nothing to say to any of you."

"Mr. Sparowe," said Gracechurchstreet, advancing to the window, "I will take the liberty of quoting French to you. It is this, sir: as they used to say in French France in the days of le Roi Soleil and those kind of mighty monarchs and such, '*Le roi est mort. Vive le roi!*' Now, sir, do I make myself clear?"

“Just as clear as mud, so now push off, or I’ll set the dog on you.”

“You are pleased to jest, I perceive, sir,” said the American courteously.

“But, Tobe,” said Dave, joining Gracechurchstreet at the window, “you don’t dig it, mate. The Moonrocket’s bin in a car crash over in the States. ’E’s a write-off. ’E may croak. ’E’s ’urt awful bad, Tobe. ’E won’t never box no more, not even if ’e lives. So, don’t you see, Tobe? I’m truly the Moonrocket nah. You gotter train me, Tobe, and then you gotter be me manager. Vere ain’t nobody else I can trust, Tobe. You gotter gimme me chance.”

“You’d better come in,” said Toby, “just you and nobody else.”

“O.K., Tobe. Just me. You uvvers,” Dave went on, with a wave of the hand which amused and astonished Toby, “go and wait in the car ontil I jines you.”

“O.K., kid,” said Gracechurchstreet. He signalled to Harry and Maverick and the three walked down the platform. Not until they were out of sight of the window did Toby thrust it fully open at the bottom.

“In you come,” he said. “I’m not opening the door again to that lot. Now, then, what’s the big idea? Where did you get to when the magistrates let you go?”

“Vat’s what I come for to tell you, Tobe. Vere’s vis big news, see. It’s in all the pipers. The Moonrocket Kid, ’e’s bin at a party, see, and vey’re all —well, *you* know— screwy, and the jacks is arter ’em, see, and when vey pulls up, ’cos the jacks ’ave put a van acrorst the road, the Moonrocket, ’e offers to fight ’em, see, and ’e do, see, and because ’e’s all done up like a dog’s dinner wiv a tuxedo and a smart titfer and creases dahn ’is ’ornets, and ants, vey don’t reckernize ’im, see, and one of the cops ’e ketches ’im a doughboy wiv ’is dirty great night-stick, see, and vat makes the Moonrocket start in pickin’ daisies, see, and ’e picks one right up aht of the grahnd, see, and ahts the cop wiv it, see, ’cos it’s the uppercut ’e kay-owes the Roarin’ River Tiger wiv, see, so vem rozzers vey all starts in on ’im and give ’im a right goin’ over, and nah ’e’s in the penitentiary ’orspital, see, and vey says as ’ow ’e’ve ’ad ’is chips and ’e won’t never fight no more, so vat mikes *me* the Moonrocket, see?”

“Good Lord!” said Toby. “Do you think it’s true? About his never fighting again, I mean.”

“It’s true, I reckon, Tobe, because, before vere was vis up an’ a downer wiv the cops, vey’ve ’ad two smashes wiv the car, and the jacks, well, vey just put a polish on the damage ’e done ’isself already. Vat’s the way of it, Tobe, so *I’m* the Moonrocket nah, and you gotter ’elp me. Chris is gorn, and ’e wasn’t never no good, nohow, and Gorinsky, ’e’s gorn, too an’ all, so vere’s on’y old ’Arry and you. Come on, mate! Show a bitta sympafy! It’s me chance!”

“Come and sit down. Where do Gracechurchstreet and Maverick come in?”

“Vey’ll put up the money to tike me and you and ’Arry to the States.”

“Like hell they will!”

“Not strite awiy, Tobe. You gotter coach me first.”

“To knock people cold, the way you did Gorinsky?”

“Cor, Tobe! Cheese! Vat wasn’t nuffink to do wiv ’im croakin’. *You* knows vat. Look, mate, let’s ’ave ’em in and Gracechurchstreet ’ull tell you the tale.”

“I’ve no doubt he will. No, no, Dave. You’ve got a straight choice. Gracechurchstreet or me. Not both. You can stay here for a bit while you make up your mind what you’re going to do, but I’m not getting myself mixed up with that lot again. I’ll teach you all I know about boxing, if that’s what you want, but then you’ll have to fend for yourself. It won’t take me long. I was never anything but a fairly good amateur, you know.”

“It won’t take long? ’Ow long, Tobe?”

“Call it a month. Could be less. It certainly won’t be more. I can’t afford the time, for one thing, and I’m hanged if I want a lodger, for another.”

“I’ll go and chew the fat wiv Gracechurchstreet.”

“Out of the window, then. I’m still not opening the door. I’m not having those two misfits swarming all over me, or I’ll never get rid of them.”

“You’re ’ard of ’eart, Tobe, ain’t you? I fought you got sympafy, but I see you never.”

“Don’t repeat your effects. They lose force.”

He pushed up the window and Dave scrambled out. Toby closed and fastened it and settled down to wait. He wondered what the surprise visit was all about and why Gracechurchstreet and Maverick, who must surely realize that the police were now looking harder than ever for Gorinsky’s

murderer, were showing themselves so openly at what was near enough to the scene of his death. Then another thought struck him. He wondered whether the police still suspected Dave of the murder and had had him released in the hope that he would later incriminate himself and present them with an open and shut case.

It was not a pleasant thought. Little though he approved of Dave's foolishness in teaming up again with Gracechurchstreet and Maverick, he did not want the boy to run into more trouble. That the two had some game on foot which was certainly not intended to lead to Dave's advantage he was absolutely certain, but what part they wanted the boy to play this time was more than he could fathom. On an impulse he went to the telephone with the intention of ringing up Dame Beatrice, but, even as his hand went out to pick up the receiver, the whole idea struck him as pointless and puerile. What was there to tell her, after all?—that Gracechurchstreet and Maverick had Dave and Harry in tow? It was no business of hers. It was no business of his own. He had refused to allow them to enter his house, and that was the end of it. He returned to the sitting-room window, pulled up a chair and settled down again. After he had been there for a full quarter of an hour and had begun to think that the men, Dave included, had decided to take themselves off, the telephone rang.

"It's me, Tobe. Mr. Gracechurchstreet got me and 'Arry fixed up 'ere at the *Swan*. Vere's everyfink 'ere as we wants—the ring and the rest of the gear. Stoppin' 'ere a munf, like you said, so come on over."

"Are Gracechurchstreet and Maverick staying there, too?"

"No, vey ain't. We got it to ourself, me and 'Arry. Come on over, Tobe. I gotter git some 'elp. You can mike me a champ, Tobe, I knows you can. I'll do everyfink like you warnts it."

"Are Gracechurchstreet and Maverick still with you?"

"No. Vey paid for our lord and dodgin' and ven vey went orf in veir noo car."

"Nothing doing, Dave. I've changed my mind. Sorry. I shall come over for a drink, as usual, but that's my lot. I don't intend to train you if you're mixed up with that push, I don't trust them."

"Cor, nah, look, Tobe . . ." Hardheartedly, Toby rang off. He returned to his work, but the Bastard family had lost its charm. He compelled himself to make a few notes, but then found himself alternately looking at the clock and across the platform to where, on the other side of the road, he

could see an end gable of the *Swan Revived*. At half-past twelve, remembering that the inn could offer him a ploughman's lunch of bread, cheese, and beer, he shut his books, replaced them in the bookcase, brushed his hair and walked briskly along the platform and across the road.

Smetton was behind the bar and, as it was the dinner-time break, several labourers were standing about drinking beer. They made way for Toby, and Smetton, without being asked, pulled him a pint of draught bitter.

"I've got company again, Mr. Sparowe," he said.

"Yes, so I've heard."

"Surprised you, I daresay."

"Well, I thought it was getting a bit near Easter. Won't you want your attics for your summer staff?"

"Not just yet, and these two are only staying a matter of three or four weeks. I suppose—I hope it don't matter me mentioning it, Mr. Sparowe—but I suppose young Holley really is in the clear, like? I wouldn't want the police keeping an eye on the place."

"I shouldn't think there's any fear of that. Have you any bread and cheese?"

Toby retired to a small table with his ploughman's lunch to which Mrs. Smetton had added a small dish of home-made chutney, and the labourers drifted out to go home to the midday meal. As soon as the bar was empty, Smetton came over to where Toby was seated.

"Mr. Sparowe," he said, "I couldn't say nothing before, seeing there was others standing around, but, now we're on our own, I have to tell you I don't much like it, sir. I don't much like it at all."

"Well, you needn't have had them here, I suppose," said Toby.

"I was talked into it, sir. That Mr. Maverick—well, the Irish blarney, as they call it, isn't nowhere in it, once he gets started in talking. Then, what with Mr. Gracechurchstreet backing him up and arguing a donkey's hind leg off . . ."

"You're not being very complimentary to yourself, are you?"

"Compli—Oh, I see! Very 'umorous, Mr. Sparowe, I'm sure!" He laughed unconvincingly and repeated, "Arguing a donkey's hind leg off! Very funny, that is, Mr. Sparowe. Still, I said it me own self, didn't I? Seriously, though, sir, you don't think I've done wrong, do you? I have doubts, meself, but I didn't see no way of getting out of it."

“I don’t think at all,” said Toby, “because I’m as bad or as good as you are, so far as Dave Holley is concerned. I told him I’d have him over at my place for a week or two, while he decided what to do with himself. It can’t have been much fun for him to have been remanded in custody for so long, knowing that a charge of murder might be tacked on the end of it. How does your wife take to the idea of having a couple of lodgers again?”

“She’s out, sir, at the moment. Her and Daffy planned to do a bit of shopping in Poole and do a bingo session this afternoon. I’ll have to break it to her when she gets home.”

“Where are Dave and Harry now?”

“Having a bit of bread and cheese and a pint up in the gym, sir. Do you want a word with them?”

“No, thanks.” Toby finished his bread and cheese, called for another pint, drank it and rose to leave. He had reckoned without his host in both senses of the word. Nobody else had come into the bar and Smetton had left it. Before Toby reached the door Smetton came back, followed by Dave Holley.

“Half a minute, Mr. Sparowe,” he said. “Dave would like a word with you.” He lifted the flap of the counter and Dave came through.

“Look,” he said, “vere’s somefink I never told you. I was goin’ to tell you over the phone, but you cut me orf. Listen, Tobe. Mr. Gracechurchstreet knows the uvver Moonrocket. ’E’s bringin’ ’is trainer over. ’E’s goin’ to train *me*, Tobe, to take on the Moonrocket nime. Only you gotter gimme a break, see? You gotter git me ready for ’im. I knows I ain’t no good. You showed me vat, didden you? So now you gotter do somefink abaht it, see? Come on, Tobe! I’ll do everyfink you say. I’ll even do trainin’ spins, ’cos I ain’t got me foby no more. Vat skinny old broad as got me vat lawyer, she ’ad it all aht of me, and it’s gorn, Tobe. I could *sleep* in vem bleedin’ woods nah.”

“Look, Dave,” said Toby, “I’m not getting mixed up with Gracechurchstreet and Maverick. I don’t like them, and I don’t trust their little games. So it’s them or me, but not both. If they show up here, that’s the end of it.”

“Vey won’t come, Tobe, honest vey won’t. Vey’re orf to the States to fix up wiv the Moonrocket, on’y ’e ain’t the Moonrocket no more, ’cos *I* am.”

“Now look here, Dave, you’ve been in enough trouble. If you have any sense you’ll have no more to do with those other two. Listen, I know a sports reporter, a very good chap, who’ll put you on to a decent club. You’ve never fought for money, have you?”

“Not for a purse, Tobe, on’y for me keep wiv Gorinsky.”

“I don’t think that would count. I think you’d still qualify as an amateur. Join this club, as I suggest, and then, later on, when you’ve had some bouts which really count—you know, inter-club competitions and perhaps a national championship, well, *then* turn pro, if you want to, and jolly good luck. How’s that for an idea?”

“Bloody lousy. I ain’t fightin’ no more as no flippin’ amacher. I’m the Moonrocket Kid, ain’t I?”

“You’re a perishing young fool.”

“Well, look, Tobe, if you won’t do nuffink more, will you come over tomorrow morning?”

“Just to give you a work-out, but nothing more. If you’d agree to chuck those two I’d take you on, as I said, but if you’re going to tack on to Gracechurchstreet and Maverick, I’m through, so what do you say?”

“Fanks a lot, Tobe. I’ll fink abaht it.”

“You see, if you think Gracechurchstreet and Maverick are intending to do you any good, Dave, I can tell you here and now that you’re dead wrong. I’d drop them like something red hot, if I were you. Can’t you ever learn sense? These chaps have already done their best to land you in the soup over the murder of Gorinsky—because, even if the police haven’t yet found out who did it, it *was* murder, you know—and if I were you I’d cut out having anything whatever to do with them.”

“You talk like a creepin’ cheese, Tobe. Vey can’t ’urt *me*! I bin acquitted, ain’t I?”

“No, Dave. I don’t know much about the law, but this I do know: you haven’t been acquitted, for the simple reason that you’ve never been brought to trial. You could be re-arrested tomorrow if the police thought they had found any fresh evidence pointing to your guilt. They’re still on the trail, you know. They never give up a case. They only file it.”

“Is vat the troof?”

“Yes, Dave, I’m afraid it is.”

“But I fought vat lawyer got me orf.”

“So far, yes, and, of course, so far, so good. But if you begin going into a huddle again with the same gang, you’re putting yourself in Queer Street. Can’t you see that?”

He returned to the station house and put through a call to Dame Beatrice. On the following morning he breakfasted an hour earlier than usual, then put on shorts and sneakers, picked up a towel and went across to the inn. Dave was waiting for him in the gym. He said, without preliminaries:

“Mr. Maverick bin on the phone.”

“Oh, yes?” said Toby. “I thought he and Gracechurchstreet had gone to America.”

“Said ’e was speakin’ from the airport. Vey missed veir plane.”

“That was clever of them!”

“You don’t mean vey done it a-purpose, Tobe? Why would vey?”

“Did they say anything else?”

“Vey warnts me to go up to Yorkshire again.”

“What on earth for?”

“I dunno. Vey’re sendin’ me the money for me fare and vey’ve booked me a room.”

“In Leeds ?”

“Vey didn’t say where. Vey’re writin’ a letter, but I knows it wouldn’t be Leeds.”

“How can you be sure?”

“Vey ’ad to scarper from Leeds p.d.q., Tobe. Vey never didn’t want to take it on the lam like vey did, and leave me and ’Arry be’ind, but I reckon somefink cropped up, Tobe, as none on ’em ’adn’t expected.”

“What cropped up was the report of Gorinsky’s death, Dave.”

“What I better do nah, Tobe?”

“Don’t ask *me*. I’ve given you my advice.”

“If I gives ’em the air, Tobe, I’m outer a crib and me bleedin’ chance goes for a burton. Besides, I’m frit of vat Gracechurchstreet. Vem teef of ’is, when ’e grins at yer, vey gives me the ’eebies, Tobe.”

“Me, too. Let’s forget it until the letter comes with your fare and the address they want you to go to. Where’s Harry?”

“Up in the gym.” They mounted the stairs in silence. The old prize-fighter, who was over in the opposite corner of the room beating a lifeless tattoo on the punching-ball, came shambling over to them.

“Harry,” said Toby, “how did Scouse get into that quarry? Who knocked him on the head and pushed him in?”

“Scouse?”

“You heard. Don’t hedge. I’ve been on the telephone, and I was told to ask you to come clean. So now, what about it?”

“Was it the p’lice on the phone?”

“Never you mind who it was. Well?”

“I dunno no more van *you* do, Mr. Sparowe.”

“You stick to that, if you think you’d better, but personally I wouldn’t advise it.”

“I clouted ’im, if you warnts to know, but I never chucked ’im inter no quarry.”

“Who did, then?”

“Honest, Mr. Sparowe, I dunno. ’Im and me, we ’ad a bit of a toss-up—you couldn’t call it no more van vat—and ’e come at me, see? Well, I can’t tike it no more, Mr. Sparowe—Dave’ll tell yer—I can’t tike it no more, so I ups wiv a bottle and I ’its ’im, but I never didn’t mean no ’arm, on’y to stop ’im rushin’ me. ’E was a wicked sorter cuss, Mr. Sparowe.”

“You’re responsible for his death, all the same.”

“I never put ’im in no quarry. ’Ow could I a-done?”

“Well, who did, then? Come on. You must know.”

“I s’pose it was vem uvver two.”

“Where did this fight take place?”

“In Lunnon. Mr. Gracechurchstreet and Mr. Maverick, vey come in and fahnd Chris bleedin’ like a pig, and vey said vey’d gotter git ’im aht of it quick, cos vey’d been rumbled, and vey reckoned Chris ’ad said somefink to the rozzers, like, abaht what ’ad wented on in Leeds. So vey picked up Chris, me ’elpin’, and us put ’im in a van vey’d ’ired and vey left me vere in the digs, and vat’s all I knows, strufe it is, Mr. Sparowe.’

“Was Scouse conscious at all while this was going on?”

“Yus, ’e tried to put up a fight, but vey freatened ’im and the last I ’eard ’im say when we dumped ’im in the van was like vis: ‘You got it wrong. It wasn’t me, chums. I never told nobody nuffink. Some barsterd grassed.’ ”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Deductions and Conclusions

"The breeze passes over the ears of wheat and they bend before it; the breeze dies down and the wheat-ears stand as they stood before its coming."

Norman H. Baynes and H. St. L. B. Moss—*Byzantium*

"But what made you stick me on to questioning Biddle?" asked Toby. "I didn't get anything important out of him. You're not going to get the poor old ruin arrested for the murder of Scouse, are you?"

"Nor for the murder of Gorinsky," said Dame Beatrice. "Few murders, in my opinion (unless they are procured by the use of poison), compare for sheer wickedness and heartless exploitation with blackmail, gun-running, and dope-peddling. The deaths of the two creatures with whom we have been to some extent concerned have affected me emotionally not at all. But then I am very far from believing that all life is sacred."

"I agree with you so far, but I'm a long way from understanding what you're getting at, I'm afraid."

"I thought it was all too obvious what the double intention was. It was so obvious, in fact, and, in essence, so simple, that the authorities passed it over. There was the promotion of a young, inexperienced, unknown boxer who had never won any kind of recognition. There was the extraordinary *liaison* between men as dissimilar as Gracechurchstreet and Maverick, and again between them and Gorinsky and his East End entourage."

"Both sides had an interest in Dave, I suppose."

"As a boxer? As a film actor? I hardly saw him making a success in either capacity. Then, as you know, I investigated this strange dislike of his for woods and groups of trees. The reason Holley was chosen was because, with the knowledge they must have gained of his infantile misadventure, they could play upon the boy's nerves and make what use of him they desired. Holley, in spite of occasional exceptions which seem to prove the rule, is an abysmally stupid child."

"Now the police have picked up Gracechurchstreet and Maverick for drug-peddling, you ought to be able to work things out for yourself," said Laura to Toby.

“Well, I can’t. I was never more surprised in my life than when I heard they’d been arrested. Will the charge stick?”

“Oh, yes,” said Sebastian Lestrange, “it will stick all right. They’ve been in the game for several years. That’s come out now. They had what they thought was a fool-proof set-up, you see, because this impresario business of theirs was genuine. Of course, this attempted flight to America didn’t come off because the police knew all about them by then, thanks to my grandmother.”

“But what made her suspect them in the first place?”

“Well,” said Dame Beatrice, answering the question for herself, “I could not make out what their reason was for taking up an unknown boxer and (if you will not misunderstand me) an almost unknown writer if they wanted to make a film. Five hundred dollars, plus the hundred pounds you say they offered you, is not princely remuneration, but quite a number of established authors would have been prepared to write a play to run one and a quarter hours for that amount of payment, I imagine.”

“So Dave and I were to be used as stool-pigeons. Can’t say I feel flattered, but, after all, I did turn them down.”

“Yes, that must have surprised and disconcerted them. Your baggage, of course, was to be the vehicle for some of the drugs. The rest was to be carried in the hollow tubing of the posts which marked off the boxing-ring. I remember making a jesting (intended as a testing) remark to Mrs. Smetton about the possibility of smuggling jewels that way, but it was clear that she had no suspicion of such a thing. Another thing which surprised and displeased them was your taking on the training of their young boxer to the extent of accompanying him on the roads.”

“Can’t see why that should upset them.”

“They could scarcely have wanted the two of you to get together in that way. Dave was stupid, but might become communicative. You were intelligent, and might have put two and two together. That is why Gracechurchstreet and not Gorinsky wrote you that offensive note.”

“And then gave the game away by putting Gorinsky’s name in the hotel register.”

“Ah, that is where Fate stepped in. As I think we said before, they had no idea that Gorinsky’s body would be found and reported so soon.”

“But I thought you said it wasn’t Smetton who put it in the quarry. When he discovered it in Maverick’s car, wouldn’t they have supposed he’d

report it at once to the police?”

“They seem to have gambled on the assumption that he wouldn’t—and they proved to be right.”

“But why? They couldn’t just have banked on his panicking.”

“Why not? After all, that is what he did. I fancy they had counted on his burying the body to get rid of it. I have always thought that Smetton knew far more about Gorinsky’s death than he has ever admitted.”

“You don’t mean *he* killed him?”

“No. I know who killed him.”

“I see you’re not going to satisfy my curiosity yet.”

“No, not yet. I, too, have a sense of the dramatic. I think they relied on Smetton’s hiding the body, but they decided that the time was ripe for them to leave the inn.”

“If Smetton had guilty knowledge of the killing—and I can see he must have had, because a man doesn’t get knocked on the head in a public house and the landlord know nothing about it—why did he consent to identify the body and, moreover, identify it correctly?”

“The fact that it had been found in the stone-quarry puzzled and worried him, I think. He thought, you see, that it would be found in Heathcote Fitzprior and in Maverick’s car.”

“But wouldn’t that direct attention immediately to Maverick?”

“Oh, no. He was to prove an alibi. Their story was that Gorinsky had gone to London ahead of them, and the inference would be that he had been attacked and robbed on the way—possibly having offered a lift to some desperate and dishonest person. After all, there were a good many people who would be able to testify that Maverick had left the inn with the others in the larger car. One of the most positive of these witnesses would have been the landlord himself.”

“But there was always the chance that he would have been spotted driving Maverick’s car away from the inn.”

“The workmen on the road outside had gone. You were known to have driven off in your own car. Who was there to know whose car it was? Smetton, however, neglected to carry on in the way they had expected. For one thing, the innocent Daffy had already seen the body and was as anxious as he was to be rid of it. I think the suggestion must have come originally from her that they should park the car on Mrs. Spreadapple’s verge rather than risk taking it further and perhaps being stopped by the police.”

“Why should the police have stopped them?”

“The contingency was most unlikely, but guilty consciences are apt to arm themselves against a mythical sea of troubles.”

“And so Fate took a hand again and sent Mrs. Spreadapple’s soldier son on leave. Then Mrs. Spreadapple’s well-known spitefulness and sense of property came into play, and unwittingly, and planning only to cause inconvenience to the owner of the car, she made her son drive it to the stone quarries.”

“Yes. What caused him to find the body—it would have been on the floor in front of the back seat and probably covered by a rug, I think—was nothing more than natural curiosity, no doubt . . .”

“Why didn’t Smetton and Daffy stow it away in the boot?”

“I imagine they thought an imaginary assassin would not have taken the risk, or perhaps they did not care for the idea of touching it.”

“Oh, well, it’s a detail, anyway. So then the soldier decided to drive the car to London and dump it. I wonder whether he spotted any bloodstains?”

“I do not think there could have been any. The bloodstains would have been made at the inn. Another reason which makes me think that Smetton must have known about the death is that the floor of the attic landing had to be cleaned up—or possibly the floor of one of the attic rooms.”

‘The floor of the attic landing—or a room up there?”

“Oh, yes, that is where the murder must have taken place. Picture the situation. Young Holley has knocked Gorinsky down. The suspicions of the rest are aroused by the strength of the young man’s feeling for you, Toby. It had become hero-worship.”

“Good Lord! But why?”

“You had shown him kindness.”

“Oh, his famous ‘sympafy,’ I suppose!”

“Well, you had definitely put yourself out on his behalf. Then, you see, you had given him a trouncing.”

“You mean when we boxed that couple of rounds together? I kept him off me, that’s all. I didn’t hit him more than I could possibly help. He resented it, you know.”

“Nevertheless, you probably gave him the impression that you were a world-beater,” said Laura. “Will he *ever* stand any chance as a boxer, would you say?”

“If he’ll take my advice and train first as an amateur, so that he takes on a bit of style and learns not to lose his temper, I think he might. He’s got the build and the stamina, and he isn’t afraid to hit people now.”

“If he was afraid to hit people—you mean after that horrible incident in his childhood, don’t you?—whatever made him go in for boxing?”

“As a kind of exorcism,” said Dame Beatrice.

“But what about the attic floor?” asked Toby.

“Well, as I see it, Gorinsky had been knocked out. What kind of temper he possessed I do not know, but I should imagine it would hardly accept philosophically and with equanimity the fact of having been so unceremoniously treated by a protégé and an employee. He had been given brandy, too, remember, when he came round, and Smetton had stated that he was a whisky drinker.”

“Never mix the grape and the grain,” quoted Laura. “You mean he was drunk for once in his life, and, not recognizing the symptoms, went berserk and decided to have it out with Dave.”

“But where did the bottle with which he was killed come in?” asked Toby.

“It came in by way of the stairs to the bar,” said Laura. “It was the bottle of brandy, I suppose.”

“I am sure it was. Smetton’s elaborate evidence that he had supplied the brandy in a large glass because Maverick’s hand was shaking was so ridiculous that I rejected it immediately,” said Dame Beatrice.

“An Irishman have a shaking hand because somebody had been knocked down in a pub brawl! Good gracious me!” said Laura. “What happened, of course, is that Maverick, without a ‘by your leave,’ snatched up the bottle of brandy from the shelf behind the bar and went pelting upstairs with it. Then, as soon as Gorinsky came out of his coma, they sloshed the stuff into him. Then he grabbed the bottle from them and tore up to the attics.”

“How did he know Dave was up there?” asked Toby.

“He took it for granted the boy had run for cover, I suppose,” said Sebastian Lestrange. “It’s instinctive in the young to bolt up to their rooms when trouble is looming downstairs.”

“But what he hadn’t reckoned with was Harry, on guard outside the door,” said Laura. “Harry is even stupider than Dave. I don’t suppose he stopped to think. All he saw was this berserk little employer—a man who

always indicated his contempt for him, and who, I daresay, incited Chris to bully him—coming up with the intention of laying out Dave."

"Yes, he was particularly attached to Dave because the kid went light on him when they were at sparring practice," said Toby. "Dave told me that himself."

"So, of course," said Laura, "Harry seized the bottle and struck Gorinsky on the head with it. I don't suppose he had the very slightest intention of killing him, any more than he intended his attack on Scouse to result in death, and it wasn't *his* fault that it did. He's punch-drunk and muscle-bound, and hit a lot harder than he meant."

"So what about the bottle of Dubonnet?" asked Toby.

"No bottle of Dubonnet was involved," said Dame Beatrice. "That is why none was ever found."

"But Dave said that it was passed in to him."

"He was lying. He thought—if you can call what he does 'thinking'—that he was helping Harry, I expect, although actually he was helping nobody, as the police ought to have realized. After all, who would ever think of giving a boy Dubonnet to drink, when all he liked was beer?" said Laura. "It doesn't make sense."

"Then what happened to the bottle of brandy? That must have had blood on it, surely?"

"Buried in Smetton's garden, most likely," said Laura. "The police were hampered from the beginning. Until they spotted your daft advertisement in the newspapers they thought Gorinsky's death was an accident, and that he'd come by his injuries by tumbling into the quarry. Then it wasn't until a long time later that counsel got the doctor to admit that the weapon *could* have been a bottle."

"But why suggest that it was a bottle of Dubonnet?" argued Toby. "It seems such an odd thing to choose, especially from bottles in a country pub. Who first said that's what it was?"

"It was the landlord, Smetton himself, if you remember. He did not claim that it was the murder weapon. He said that he found he was a bottle short. He had two bottles of Dubonnet, whereas he should have been able to account for three."

"Could be true that one was missing, without any reference to the murder, though, couldn't it?"

"Yes, except for a mistake which Smetton made," said Dame Beatrice.

“Causing your suspicions of him to grow?”

“My suspicions that he knew more about Gorinsky’s death than he allowed he did?”

“Yes, that’s what I meant.”

“He said that the missing bottle was one of the two which he put in the cellar. That did not make sense to me. From the beginning, taking into account all the circumstances which came to my notice, I did not believe for an instant that the murder of Gorinsky was premeditated. The flight of the whole party, without previous notice, from the *Swan Revived*, appeared to indicate that. Their departure was so very precipitate. Then, a bottle is one of the last things a man who had *planned* a murder would select as a weapon, if only for the reason that it offers such a good surface for fingerprints. A bottle is an object which a person would only snatch up in sudden fury if he wished to injure someone.”

“He often knocks the end off it first,” said Toby. “Makes a very pretty weapon, I believe.”

“Poor old Harry wouldn’t think of dirty work like that,” said Laura. “He simply snatched the thing out of Gorinsky’s hand and crowned him with the base of it. And if you’re going to ask me why Gorinsky didn’t knock the neck off it before going upstairs to have it out with Dave, I would remind you that brandy, even the sort that you drink with soda, costs a lot more than whisky or gin or rum or vodka, and no one with Gorinsky’s commercial instincts would have wanted to waste the stuff by knocking the bottom off a bottle and carving somebody up with the splintered end.”

“I see. I think I agree, too. But I’m afraid I butted in and interrupted Dame Beatrice. You were going to say something about taking a bottle from the cellar, I believe.”

“Well, there were a number of full bottles of various kinds on the shelf in the bar. If the murder was unpremeditated, why go down to the cellar for the murder weapon when there was a similar weapon immediately to hand? The statement that the bottle had been purloined from the cellar seemed to me most unikely.”

“But if the weapon was a brandy bottle, it’s only flogging a dead donkey to keep on about the Dubonnet, isn’t it?”

“Certainly it is, but, if you will reflect upon this conversation, you will remember that it was you who asked, ‘Why a bottle of Dubonnet?’ If you will further charge your memory, you may also recollect that I told you it

was unnecessary to look for a bottle of Dubonnet in the stone-quarry where the body was found. I was certain it was not there."

"But when the police checked Smetton's stock, as I suppose they did . . ."

"My dear fellow," said Sebastian Lestrange, "have you never heard of cooking the books? Smetton, knowing (as the police did *not* know when they began their enquiry) that Gorinsky had had a bottle bounced on his head, would have made the necessary alterations in his ledger or whatever book he uses to write down his sales and so forth, and the brandy *and* the Dubonnet would both be satisfactorily accounted for, just in case any questions were asked. As my grandmother has pointed out, there is nothing like a guilty conscience to make people paint the lily."

"I wonder why he didn't go straight to the police the minute that lot had cleared off? He had nothing to lose, had he?"

"He may have had something to gain. I wonder what happened to the hundred one-pound notes which Gracechurchstreet once showed you?" said Laura. "I expect he was both bribed and threatened. Of course, he never expected to be the one person asked to identify the body. It was the merest chance that that man who first saw it lying in the stone-quarries immediately connected it with the inn."

"Of course, I can see why the others didn't go to the police, but cleared out of the neighbourhood instead. If they were dope-peddling, the last thing they would have wanted was an official investigation. They would have warned Harry to keep his mouth shut unless he wanted a life-sentence, and I suppose they knew that Dave would stand by Harry. What I don't understand is how you ever got on to the idea that they were smuggling dope—or anything else, for that matter," said Toby.

"First, there was the story of the unknown woman," said Dame Beatrice. "It seemed strange that nobody except Smetton claimed to have seen her, and, of course, she does not exist. It was a rather clumsy scheme to get two extra suitcases into the inn without arousing the landlord's suspicions. Up to that point, you see, Smetton was not implicated."

"More painting of the lily?—the clumsy scheme, I mean."

"Yes. I cannot see any reason why they could not have brought the suitcases in openly, but, of course, they were needed so that the tubular posts in the gymnasium could be exchanged for innocent empty ones as

soon as the party moved on. They did not, of course, expect to have to move on quite so soon. The death of Gorinsky settled the date of their departure."

"Then was Gorinsky implicated in the dope business?"

"Oh, I'm sure he was. Sponsoring a young boxer gave him a wonderful excuse for travelling about in this country and abroad, and so peddling the dope with impunity," said Laura. "The clever part of the business was that both parties—Gracechurchstreet and Gorinsky—had perfectly legitimate reasons for making journeys, and could prove that they had."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Moonrocket Kid

"Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap
To kiss the tender inward of thy hand?"

William Shakespeare—*Sonnet 128*

"Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end."

William Shakespeare—*Sonnet 60*

"It's been a long time," said Laura. "What have you been up to, the last two years?"

"Nothing shady," said Toby. "I'm awfully glad you agreed to come. Do you often attend boxing-matches?"

"I've never been to one before, but when you wrote and told me Dave was having an important bout I thought I'd like to cheer him on. Congratulations, by the way, on *Virginia Creeper*."

"I really owe it to Gracechurchstreet, I suppose. If he'd never propositioned me, as he called it, and made all those ludicrous suggestions, I don't imagine I'd ever have thought of making an acting-script from my book. Of course, the theatre people have altered it a good bit, but I've been allowed a certain amount of liberty in passing or not passing the alterations, and I'm pretty fairly satisfied with the result. Did you really like it?"

"Yes, so did Mrs. Croc. It was very nice of you to send us tickets. What about the result of tonight's fight? If Dave wins, is he going to America?"

"Oh, yes, he's set on it, and there's no reason now why he shouldn't, if that's what he wants. There's a fellow who's come over especially to watch him, so he tells me. Well, now, what shall we eat before we go to cheer on the gladiators?"

The audience, for the most part, was young, enthusiastic, and noisy. There were, however, a number of quiet, hard-eyed, stiff-bosomed older gentlemen in the ringside seats who were there on the business of talent-

spotting. Some moderately interesting bouts were concluded, there was a great deal of ear-splitting partisan applause and then Toby straightened up a little as a middle-weight bout lasting eight rounds was announced.

"Want to bet?" asked Toby. "I'll give you six to five on Dave."

"No, my conscience won't let me accept a bet at those miserable odds," said Laura.

Two dressing-gowned figures ducked under the ropes and took opposite corners. They were introduced to the crowd, there were the usual preliminaries, and the fight began. It was a middleweight contest because Dave, now twenty years old, had filled out and become heavier, although he was not yet at his full strength. He was less graceful than he had been at eighteen, but still beautifully built. His jaw had an over-confident, aggressive tilt, and he had faced the cheers and counter-cheers which greeted his name with a degree of aplomb and complacency which caused Toby to entertain some serious misgivings.

The opponent, who was billed as Wattie Lyon, was a sandy-haired young man with a round, expressionless face, a remarkably small nose, and outstanding red ears. He was more stockily-built than Dave, and was an inch or two shorter, but he made up for this by possessing unusually ape-like arms, so that he actually had the longer reach of the two contestants.

"How do you size them up? I know nothing about this," murmured Laura, as the boxers began, rather cautiously, to test each other out.

"I think Dave may have his hands full. If I'm not mistaken, the other boy knows his way around. I just hope Dave doesn't think this is going to be a walk-over, because it isn't."

"He seems to be going carefully enough at present."

"At present he's doing as he's been told, I expect, and I'm not sure it's the right advice to give anyone of Dave's elementary intelligence. He's probably telling that other chap more about himself than he realizes. It might have been better policy to go for the fellow baldheaded as soon as he heard the gong."

The first round came to an end amid some cat-calling from the back of the hall. The boxers took their one-minute rest, swilled water round their mouths and spat into ceremonial buckets, had their faces and necks sponged, had their gum-shields restored, and were given rapid-fire, emphatic advice by their seconds. The advice was continued or contradicted by their supporters as they faced one another for the second round.

Here the exchanges were brisk and lively. There was no hard punching because, although Wattie attempted to use his longer reach, Dave's footwork was good enough to keep him out of range until he could see a chance to get in close and jab a left, a right, and a left again to the body. A little of this, and Wattie each time went into a clinch from which, when they were separated by the referee, Dave danced away until he could make a wasp-like attack once more, venomous, but not lethal.

There was applause at the end of the round. There had been no fireworks, but the fight had begun to satisfy the crowd by providing plenty of action although of an insignificant kind. The gong went for round three, and suddenly the fight woke up. Dave, obviously convinced that he had the measure of his man, went in to make a quick kill with a combination of science and ferocity which had the audience whistling and yelling. Time and again he got his opponent on the ropes and only just failed to find the punch he needed, but each time his flailing adversary managed to break away. In the end, however, probably nothing but the bell saved him.

The fourth round opened quietly. Toby muttered to Laura that one or other of the fighters would make it the conclusive round, he thought.

"One or other of them? I thought Dave was easily on top," she protested.

"The other fellow is giving Dave the needle. Notice how he keeps talking to him? It's the old Cassius Clay trick of trying to make the other chap lose his temper, and, with a bone-head like Dave, it may very well work. Once he begins swinging he'll leave himself wide open, and that will be his lot. This Wattie has the name for possessing an ox-felling punch if only he gets the chance to use it. He took a lot of punishment in that last round, but it hasn't shaken him. I offered you six to five on Dave, but I don't feel even that much confidence in his chances if once he starts going wild, and that's what's going to happen."

A vicious right to Wattie's mouth and nose cut short that warrior's conversation, and blood began to trickle down his chin.

"That was with the open glove," said Toby. "Dirty work at the crossroads. The referee dosn't seem to have seen it. The other chap's been using the same tactics, though, so, although I hope I wouldn't emulate him, I don't blame Dave all that much."

The round continued tamely, on the whole. Both men were warned, Dave to keep his head up, Wattie for low punching, and the bell broke up

one of the many clinches into which the contestants had fallen. The advice of the crowd was now coloured by blasphemous criticism. The seconds, busy on their principals' faces and torsos, were becoming urgent in their advice. The boxers nodded grimly and allowed their gumshields to be put back. Then the gong sounded for the fifth round.

The crowd shouted and booed as the boxers, adopting a crablike stance, circled primitively round one another, neither offering to lead off. Suddenly tension was on and electricity filled the air. Wattie was seen to make a remark as he side-stepped a halfhearted swing from Dave's right. Dave, still on balance, although the swing had missed Wattie's head by at least a foot, suddenly seemed to gallop at his opponent as though he were a stampeding bull. Wattie lunged at him, but a feint to the head, a bang in the ribs, a left lead and a right cross, and Wattie, like one battling against a cataract, found himself on the ropes. He tried to push Dave away, but the younger man almost contemptuously brushed him off before he came at him two-handed and bored his way in. A devastating left into Wattie's body was followed by a crashing right-hander to the side of the jaw; then, as the man's head slewed sideways with the cruel force of the blow, Dave stepped in with his left and knocked his opponent clean through the ropes.

"Well, fanks, Tobe," said the Moonrocket Kid, magnificent in a brand-new golden dressing-gown on which his chosen title was embroidered in peacock blue. "It's nice you comed to see me fight afore I wented to the States. I got sponsors, Tobe, a sight bettern vem uvvers I 'ad."

"You mean Gracechurchstreet and Maverick? You may meet them again some day, when they've done their bit of time. Give them my love, if you do."

"Onless I'm billed to fight over on vis side, Tobe, I don't reckon I'll meet 'em. Vey wasn't too bad to me, you know. I mean, when vey could 'ave shopped me for doin' Gorinsky vey never. Vey stuck up for me all vey could."

"Only because they regarded you as a valuable property, Dave. You were no good to them in quod."

"Wot did you fink of the fight, Tobe?"

"I thought you put your man away in masterly fashion. We were afraid, at the beginning of the fifth, that you were going to sleep, both of you."

“You see as in the forf ’e was needlin’ me, Tobe, did yer? Gabby all froo the rahnd.”

“Yes. I also saw you hit him with the open glove. Just as well the ref didn’t spot it, wasn’t it?”

“Well, I warnted to shut ’is bleedin’ marf. Wouldn’t *you* ’ave warnted to shut ’is bleedin’ marf, Tobe? ’E just kep’ narkin’ on at me all the time.”

“Well, you shut his mouth with your open glove all right, but, apart from that, it was a pretty slow round, I thought.”

“’Cos why? ’Cos I was tryin’ to figger aht where I’d met ’im before, and it warn’t ’til the fiff I rumbled ’im. It was wot ’e said to me in the fiff as mide me rumble ’im, Tobe—just somefink ’e said.”

“Yes, I spotted that. He must have said something extra special because, suddenly, you got busy. What did he say to stir you up like that?”

“’E said, ‘Oo killed Krika?’ And ven, Tobe, I cottoned on. I reckon vat skinny old broad, wot come to talk to me in the nick two or free times, told you abaht me and wot I done when I was a nipper? Well, vis bloke, vis Wattie Lyon, vat ain’t ’is real moniker, so vat’s why I never reckernized ’im at first. It’s like me callin’ meself the Moonrocket Kid. ’Ow ’e warnts ’is nime said is sort of *Wot a Lion*. See wot I mean?”

“Yes, I see. Quite clever, really.”

“Well, ’e didn’t look so clever when I put ’im froo the ropes. did ’e? ‘Oo killed Krika?’ ’e says. And ven I cottons on. ’E’s the same bloke told on me arter we bin in vem woods, ’im wiv a skirt and me wiv vat bleedin’ keeper. ‘Oo killed Krika?’ ’e says. So I done ’im, on’y, vis time, I didn’t need no bottle, like when I done Gorinsky.”

“You don’t mean that, Dave!”

“Don’t mean wot? A-course I done Gorinsky, Tobe. Vat skinny old broad, *she* knowed, vough she never let on. I never meant to do ’im, but ’e pushes old ’Arry aht the way and come at me bald-’eaded with a dirty great bottle, so I takes it outer ’is ’and—’e was on’y a liddle pip-squeak of a feller—and I crahns ’im, and dahn ’e goes, and the uvvers, vey tikes ’im away and locks me in again. And ven vey comes for me and tells me the tale abaht tikin’ ’im to the ’orspital, and ’ow we gotter scarper ’cos the landlord wouldn’t ’ave us vere no more, ’cos ’e was fritted Gorinsky might croak, and vat put the wind up me proper, ’cos of wot I done.”

“But I thought it was Harry Biddle, not you, who hit Gorinsky on the head!”

“Nark it! Old ’Arry wouldn’t never ’ave dared to crahn the boss. Besides, ’e don’t fink quick enough, not ’Arry don’t. It tikes *me* to fink quickly, Tobe. You can see vat nah.”

“But Harry, later on, hit Chris with a bottle, too. You couldn’t have done that, because you were still in custody, so why do you say you did the other?”

“Old ’Arry, ’e’s on’y a copy-cat, Tobe. ’E seen me crahn Gorinsky, don’t you forgit. ’E seen me crahn Gorinsky, so, when ’im and Chris ’ad an up an’ a downer, ’e follered suit, didden ’e? Vat’s wot ’e done—’e follered suit. ’E ain’t a quick finker like me.”

“Well, I don’t know what to make of this, Dave.”

“Did you fink the old broad told you ’Arry done it?”

“Yes, I thought she did, complete with chapter and verse—although come to think of it—” He looked accusingly at Laura, who grinned.

“Say, Tobe . . .”

“Say on.”

“If you’d a-knowed as it was me, would you ’ave stood my friend, like?”

“I suppose so. Well, I’m not sure. Look, Dave, I really don’t know.”

“I reckon the old broad saved me from the jacks, Tobe, ’cos she cottoned on all right, vough *’ow* she knowed I dunno.”

“Perhaps she’s a quick thinker, too, Dave. There must be more than one of you in the world.”

Acknowledgment

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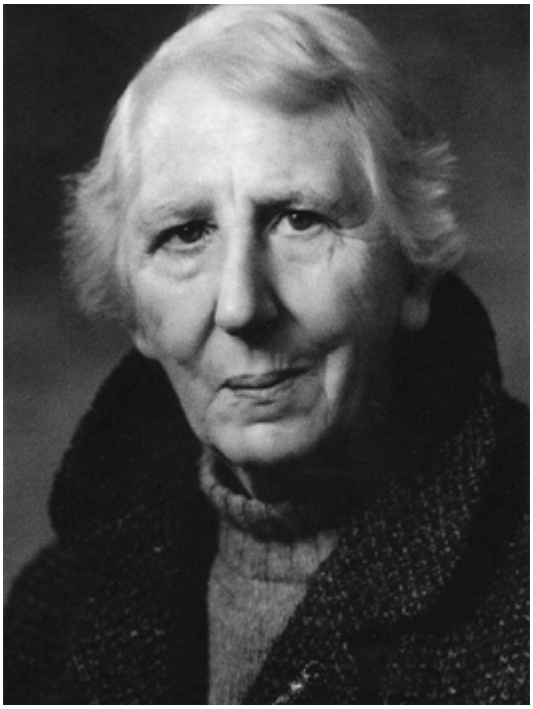
About the Author



Gladys Mitchell was born in the village of Cowley, Oxford, in April 1901. She was educated at the Rothschild School in Brentford, the Green School in Isleworth, and at Goldsmiths and University Colleges in London. For many years Miss Mitchell taught history and English, swimming, and games. She retired from this work in 1950 but became so bored without the constant stimulus and irritation of teaching that she accepted a post at the Matthew Arnold School in Staines, where she taught English and history, wrote the annual school play, and coached hurdling. She was a member of the Detection Club, the PEN, the Middlesex Education Society, and the British Olympic Association. Her father’s family are Scots, and a Scottish influence has appeared in some of her books.